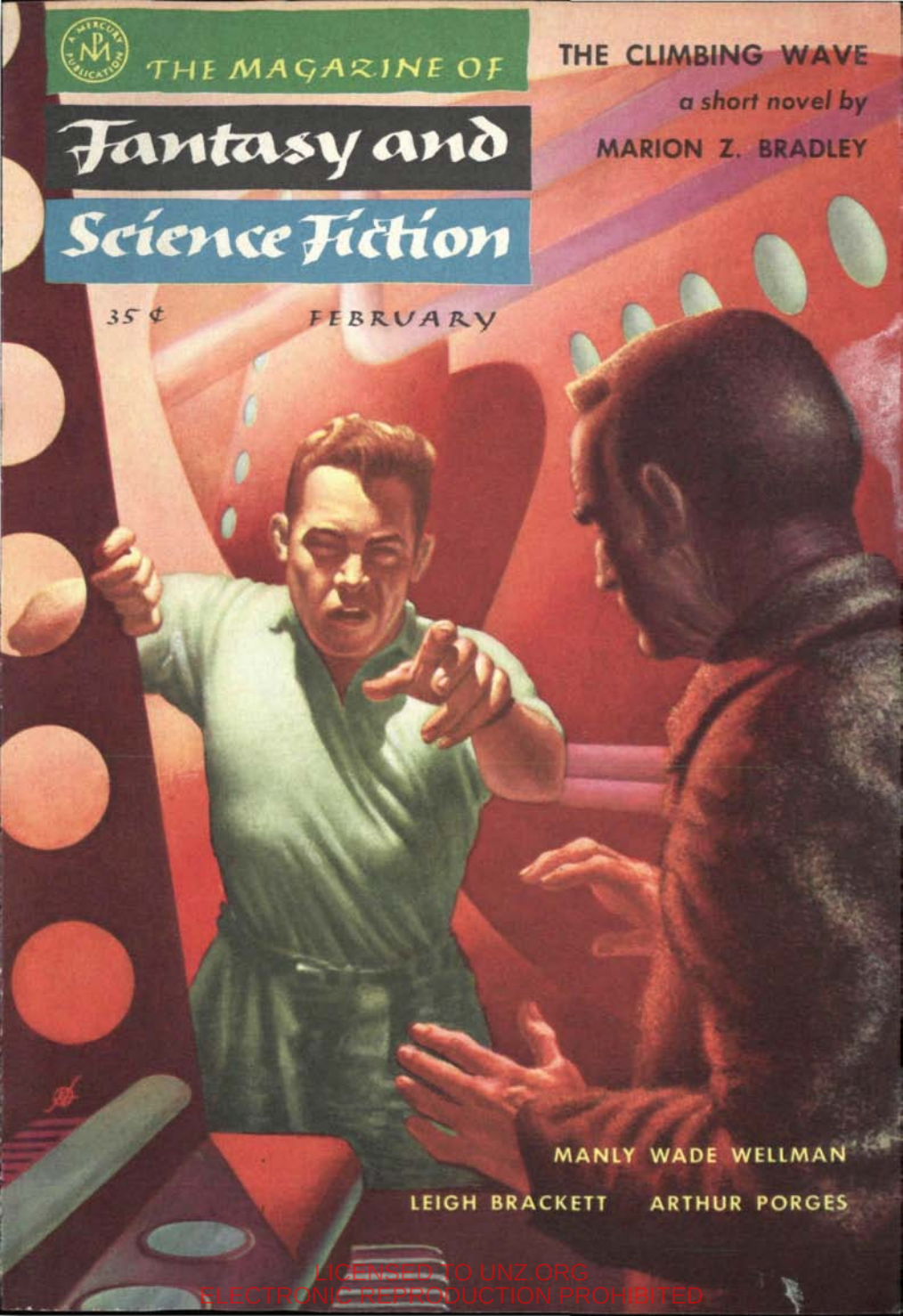


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THE MAGAZINE OF

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 2 FEBRUARY

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*Cover painting by Kelly Freas*
*(from The Climbing Wave, by Marion Zimmer Bradley)*

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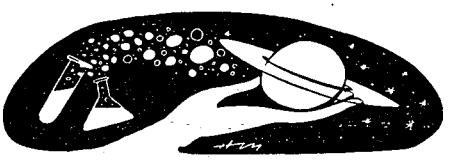

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*Marion Zimmer Bradley is a relatively new professional writer, only recently graduated from the ranks of fans; yet, to judge from your reactions, one of the most successful stories F&SF published in 1954 was her powerfully conceived and movingly executed novelet,* Centaurus Changeling. *It's gratifying, to writers and editors alike, to know that readers are willing to judge a story on its own merits rather than on the Name of the author; and I'll prophesy that Mrs. Bradley will, as a result, soon be a Name of considerable importance herself. This new short novel, like her previous story, demonstrates her ability to write pure modern science fiction, combining striking concepts, thought out in full detail, with a story of human problems and character. I don't think you'll soon forget the crew of the starship* Homeward, *who returned from man's first thrust at the stars to discover an Earth they never made and could not understand. . . .*

# *The Climbing Wave*

*by* MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

BRIAN KEARNS KNEW TO THE second, by his ship-time chronometer and by the faint, almost imperceptible humming of a monitor screen, when the limit of gravity tolerance was reached. Giving himself a round ten seconds for safety margin — Brian was a practical and methodical young man, and had spent twelve years training for this work and four and a half years doing it — he unfastened the straps on his sky-hook, the free-swinging, nest-like lounge cradle where he had been lying with ears and eyes fastened on the complex controls. He inched patiently, fly-like, down the wall, braced himself to a handhold, and threw a certain switch to the farthest position leftward.

The barely perceptible humming stopped.

Brian Kearns had just put himself out of a job.

He picked up the stylus chained to the logbook, held a floating page down with his right hand, and wrote swiftly and expertly with his left:

"1676th day of voyage; have just thrown switch which cut the interstellar drives. Our calculations were correct and there appear to have been no visible shock effects as the IS units went out of function. We



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are now standing fourteen hundred miles off Mars. Relinquished control of ship at —" he glanced at the chronometer again, and wrote "— 0814 hours. Position . . ." He added a series of complicated numerals, scribbled his initials beneath the entry, then picked up the hook of the intercabin communicator and waggled it.

A dim rasping voice said from the other end of the starship, almost half a mile away, "That you, Kearns?"

"Right, Caldwell."

"We're standing by with atomics back here, Brian. Were the figures right?"

"All calculations appear to have been correct," Brian answered stiffly. "The drives have been cut according to the schedule previously worked out."

"Yippee!" the voice shouted from the loudspeaker, and Brian frowned and coughed reprovingly. The faraway voice appeared to be stifling an expletive, but inquired correctly: "Standing by for orders, Captain Kearns?"

"All right, Captain Caldwell," Brian said; "she's your ship, as of—" he stopped, glanced at the chronometer again, and after a few seconds said "*now!*"

He put down the hook, and looked around the main control room, in which he had spent the best part of the *Homeward*'s long voyage. The tremendous interstellar drives were silent now, their dim hum stilled, and the metal surfaces faced him with a blank, metallic unresponsiveness. Brian had a curious feeling of anticlimax while he recapped the stylus, slid a moving panel over the logbook, and clung there to the handhold, wondering with the back part of his mind if he had left anything undone, while knowing, with the sureness of long habit, that he had not.

It is impossible to shrug one's shoulders in free fall; the motion sends you flying across the cabin, and Brian was too well-trained to make waste motions of that sort. But his eyebrow lifted a little, and a sort of elated grin spread across his face; for a minute, unobserved, he looked almost as young as he was. Then, re-schooling his expression to the gravity he always wore in the presence of his crew, he inched back across the wall, methodically unstrapped his rubber sandals from their place in the skyhook, worked his feet into them with the skill of long practice, and, pulling himself swiftly across the remaining section of wall, wriggled the forward part of his body through the sphincter lock which led to the forward part of the great starship.

There he paused, his middle clasped firmly by the expanding diaphragm, looking down the narrow, cylindrical corridor. He could feel, now, the faint vibration all around him, as far away in the nose of the *Homeward* the atomic rockets began firing. He allowed himself to

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grin again, this time with the secret contempt of a hyperdrive technician for rockets, however necessary, and slowly hauled the rest of his long, narrow body through the sphincter; then, pushing his feet hard against the diaphragm which had snapped tight behind him, he arrowed down, in a straight line, his body rocketing weightless down the corridor. He braked himself with strong hands at the far end, then paused; there was a musical mewing behind him, and the ship's cat, Einstein — actually a Centaurian mammal more nearly resembling a dwarf kangaroo — somersaulted dizzily through the air toward him.

"Brian — catch him!" a girl's voice called, and Brian turned, hooking one rubber sandal through a strap, and made a wide sweeping grab for the creature. He caught it by one spindly leg; it squalled and thrashed to get away, and the girl called anxiously "Hang on, I'm coming." She propelled herself down the corridor, and hurriedly snatched the little animal, who immediately quieted and snuggled under her chin.

"He went crazy when the rockets started," she murmured apologetically. "It must be the vibration or something."

Brian grinned down at the girl, who was small and slight, her curly fair hair standing weirdly around her head and her prim brief overall floating out in odd billows. They had all lived at free fall conditions for so long that he barely noticed this, but he did see the disquiet in her brown eyes — Elinor Wade was a food culturist, and knew rather less about the drives than the Centaurian cat.

"It's all right, Ellie; maybe Einstein's a hyperdrive technician. I just cut the IS units and turned the ship over to Caldwell.

She whispered, "Then we're almost there! Oh, Brian!" and her eyes were a double star, first magnitude. He nodded. "It's Caldwell's command now, so I don't know what he'll do," Brian added, "but you'd better keep your ears lapped over for instructions. We'll have to strap in, in a few minutes, for deceleration, if he's going to brake in at Mars."

"Brian, I'm scared. . . ." Ellie whispered, and let the Centaurian cat float free, fumbling around for his hand. "It would be — hideously ironical, if this old ship travelled to Centaurus and back, and then cracked up in atmosphere —"

"Relax," Brian advised her genially. "He may decide to go on to Earth, anyway — Caldwell knows his business, Ellie. And I know the *Homeward*."

"You certainly do." The girl attempted a smile, which somehow missed its purpose. "You're in love with this old wreck!"

Brian grinned disarmingly. "I won't deny it," he answered. "But it's just a kind of substitute passion till I can get you down to earth!"

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The girl blushed and turned her face away from him. The twelve members of the *Homeward*'s crew were all young, and the confined quarters aboard generated strong attachments; but men and women were carefully segregated aboard ship, for an excellent and practical reason which had nothing to do with morality. The trip from Centaurus, even at hyperspeeds, took the best part of five years. And no one has yet discovered any method for delivering a baby in free fall.

Brian unhooked his rubber shoe. "Going into the lounge?"

"No. . . ." She hung back. "I've got to feed Einstein, after — Paula's still in the Food Culture unit, and there's no public address system in there — I'd better go and tell her we may have to strap in. Go on ahead, and I'll tell Paula —"

"I'll come with you. I'm hungry and I want to snatch a bite before we go out, anyhow —"

"No!" The sharpness of her voice amazed him. "Go on out in the lounge, I'll bring you something."

He stared at her. "What —"

"Go on. Paula's — Paula's —" Ellie fumbled and finished "— she's dressing in there."

"What the devil —" Brian, suddenly suspicious, shoved hard against the handhold, and barreled across the corridor to the open lock of the Food Culture unit. Ellie gave a wordless cry of warning as Brian fell through the doorway, and in the aftermath of that cry, beneath Brian's intrusive stare, two fused figures jerked convulsively and thrust apart. Paula Sandoval flung her arms over her face and grabbed at a floating garment, while Tom Mellen jacknifed upright and glared belligerently at Brian.

"Get the hell out of here!" he roared, simultaneous with Brian's needle-voiced "What's going on in here?"

There was blue vitriol in Paula Sandoval's taut voice. "I think you can *see* what goes on, Captain!" and her black eyes snapped fire at him.

"Brian —" Ellie implored, her hand on his wrist with a gentle, repressive force. He threw it off with a violence that flung her halfway across the cabin.

He said, with icy command, "You'd better get up front, Paula. Caldwell will need his figures checked. As for you, Mellen, regulations —"

"Regulations go jump in a hot jet, and you too!" Tom Mellen stormed. He was a loose-limbed young fellow, well over six feet tall and looking longer. "What the hell do you think you're doing anyway, pushing your weight around?"

"Look," Brian said tersely, and jerked around to the girls, "Paula, get up front — *that's an order!* Tom, this part of the ship is off limits for men except at regular meal periods. This is the fifth time —"

"The sixth to be exact, Captain's Log-book, and four times you didn't catch me. So what? What the hell are *you*, a blasted —"

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"We'll leave my personal habits out of the matter, Mister Mellen. *Sandoval!*" he flung at Paula. "I gave you an order!"

Ellie had her arms around Paula, who was sobbing harshly, but the small dark girl pulled away from Ellie, her eyes ablaze. "Give him another one for me, Tom," she said bitterly, and scooted out of the cabin. Brian added, more quietly, "You go too, Ellie. I'll settle this with Mellen right now."

But Ellie did not move. "Brian," she said quietly, "this is a pretty stupid time to be enforcing that regulation."

"As long as the *Homeward* is in space," Brian said tightly, "that particular regulation — and all others based on principles of necessity — will be enforced."

"You listen here —" Mellen began furiously, then abruptly, his face suffusing with violent color, he flung himself upward at Brian, before Kearns realized what was coming. "The atomics are on," he grated. "Which means Caldwell's captain! And for three years I've been waiting for this —"

Brian dodged in a queer, jerky gesture, and Mellen hurtled over his head, thrown on by the momentum of his own blow. "*Brian! Tom!*" Ellie begged, diving toward them and thrusting her rubber-sandaled feet between the men, but Mellen shoved her aside.

"I'm warning you, Ellie, get out of the way —" he panted. Brian started "Look here —" then, as Mellen plunged at him again, put out both hands and shoved hard.

Momentum met momentum. Brian and Mellen spun apart with such violence that heads cracked at opposite ends of the food culture unit, and Brian, half-stunned, dragged himself groggily upright.

Mellen's laughter, wry and ironical, filled the cabin.

"Okay, damn it," he said bitterly. "I suppose there's no use having it out here and now. But just wait till I get you down to earth —"

Brian rubbed his head and blinked dizzily, but his voice was precise, giving no hint of the shooting stars that were chasing themselves before his eyes. "By that time," he answered coldly, "there will no longer be occasion for fighting, since my command will have terminated."

Mellen tightened his mouth, and Ellie interceded anxiously: "Tom, Brian is perfectly right, theoretically — don't stir up hard feelings now, when we're almost home —"

"Yeah, that's right. . . ." Tom Mellen suddenly grinned, and his face was good-natured. "Hey, Brian, how about it? No hard feelings, huh?"

Brian turned away. He said frigidly, "Why should there be hard feelings? It's my duty to enforce regulations until the *Homeward* is down."

"God damn —" Mellen muttered under his breath at Brian's rigid back, and even Ellie looked trou-

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bled. Then Mellen made a useless movement and started toward the front of the ship.

"Come on. I expect Caldwell will be wanting us," he said tightly, and propelled himself in quick, wrathful jerks toward the forward lounge.

II

The technique of braking into atmosphere had been perfected a hundred years before the old *Starward* rose from Earth to aim at Centaurus. However, it was new to the *Homeward*'s crew, and the tediousness of the process set nerves to jittering. Only Brian, strapped into one of the skyhooks in the lounge, was really calm, and Ellie, in the cradle next to his, absorbed a little of his calm confidence; Brian Kearns had been trained aboard the *Homeward* for twelve years before the trip began.

It had taken four generations for the stranded crew of the original ship, the *Starward*, to repair the hyperdrives smashed in landing, and to wrest from the soil of θ Centauri fourth planet — Terra Two, they called it — enough cerberum to take a pilot crew back to earth with news of their success. A hundred and thirty years, subjective time. Taking account of the time-lags engendered by their hyperspeeds, it was entirely possible that four or five hundred years had elapsed, objectively, on the planet their ancestors had left. Ellie, looking across at Brian's calm face, at his mouth that persisted in grinning with some personal, individual elation when he thought himself unwatched, wondered if he felt no regrets at all. Ellie struggled with a moment of blinding homesickness, remembering their last view of the little dark planet spinning around the red star. They had left a growing colony of 400 souls, a world to which they could never return, for, after five years of subjective time in hyperspeeds, it was entirely possible that everyone they had known on Terra Two had already lived out a full lifetime.

But Brian's thoughts were moving forward, not backward, and he could not keep them to himself.

"I suppose by now they've discovered a better method for braking into atmosphere," he mused. "If anybody's watching us, down there, we probably look like living fossils — and I suppose we are. In their world, we'll be so obsolete that we'll feel like stone-age man!"

"Oh, I don't know," Ellie protested. "People don't change —"

"But civilizations do," Brian insisted. "There was less than a hundred years between the first rocket to Luna and the launching of the *Starward*. That's how fast a scientific civilization can move."

"But how can you be sure they've moved along those lines?" Ellie wanted to know.

"Have you ever heard of time-binding?" he asked derisively. "When each generation accumulates

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the knowledge of the one before it, progress is a perfectly cumulative, straightforward thing. When the *Starward* left —"

"Brian —" she began, but he rushed on: "I grant you that man progressed at random for thousands of years, but when he acquired the scientific method, it was less than a hundred years from jet plane to rocketship. A race which had interstellar travel could progress in only one direction. If we wanted to take the time, we could sit down with an electronic calculator and add it all up, and predict exactly what we'd find down there."

"It seems," Ellie said slowly, "That you're leaving out the human element. The crew of the *Starward* were all scientists, hand-picked for compatibility, and the Terra Two colony is probably the nearest thing to a homogeneous society that ever existed. You can't make that kind of predictions for a normally populated planet."

"The human element —"

"Will you two quit it?" shouted Langdon Forbes angrily from his skyhook. "I'm trying not to get spacesick, but Kearns sounding off about progress is about all I can take! Does he have to pick a time when we're strapped in, and can't get away?"

Brian grumbled something unintelligible and lapsed into morose silence. Ellie reached dragging fingers, newly clumsy, toward him, but he pushed the hand away.

A dismal wailing came from beneath Ellie's skyhook; Einstein was getting reacquainted with gravity, and didn't like it. Ellie scooped up the miserable little animal and held it cuddled tight against her straps. It was silent in the lounge; the steady, low vibration of the atomic drives was a sound already so deeply embedded in their consciousness that they did not think of it as sound at all. There was still no feeling of motion, but there was an unpleasant, dragging sensation as the enormous starship made its wide braking circles, first grazing the atmosphere for a second or two, as it swung elliptically, like a crazy comet; then entering atmosphere for a few seconds, then a full minute, then a few minutes — coming "down" in slow, careful spirals.

"I hope they've found some way to put artificial gravity in spaceships," Judy Keretsky moaned, half-laughing, from the skyhook where she swung, upside down, from what was now the ceiling of the lounge. Her long, curly hair fell down over her head in a thick curtain; she alone of starship's crew did not keep her hair clipped functionally short. She batted futilely at the waving curls as she wailed, "Oh, my poor head, I'm getting di-i-izzy up here!"

"You're getting dizzy! What about this poor cat!" Ellie jibed.

"Say, whose idea was it to bring that animal along, anyhow?" someone demanded.

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"Very valuable contribution to science," Judy burlesqued. "Why didn't you bring a pair of them, Ellie!"

"Brian wouldn't let her," Marcia van Schreeven jeered, with an undertone of bitterness.

Ellie patted Einstein's darkish fur defensively, reminding Marcia in her peaceful voice: "Einstein is one of the third gender. When conditions are right, he'll reproduce in the first and second."

"Lucky animal," Brian said half-seriously, and Ellie glanced at him with unusual shyness as she murmured, "Well, Einstein will be unique on Earth, anyhow!"

"You'll see things much weirder than Einstein," Brian said offhandedly. "We've only been on one planet, and by now, Earth has probably colonized all the nearer stars. The people of Earth will be cosmopolitan in the largest sense —"

"Speaking of Earth," Langdon forcibly headed him off before he could hold forth again, "where on the planet are we going to set this thing down?"

"We won't know that till we contact the surface," Judy said irritably, batting her hair back. "We have the map the Firsts gave us, but it's unthinkable that the old spaceport at Denver would still be in use, and if it is, it would probably be so changed that we wouldn't know how to land — and too crowded for an IS ship this size."

"You've been listening to Brian," Langdon grinned. "According to him, it's a wonder we haven't already bumped into the local rocket for the second galaxy!"

Brian ignored the confusion of technical terms and answered seriously "That's why I suggested landing on Mars. There are enough desert areas, on Mars where we could have landed without any danger of damaging urbanized sections. I doubt if the population there is quite so centralized —"

"Well, why *didn't* we?" Marcia queried sharply, and Langdon, frowning, twisted his head to her. "We tried to radio them from space," he answered, "but they evidently didn't pick up our signals. So Caldwell and Mellen decided to bring us in to Earth instead of wasting time braking in at Mars and maybe having to pick up again. We haven't enough fuel for more than one landing and pick-up."

"We could certainly have refueled at Mars —" Brian began, but was interrupted by an apologetic cough from the loudspeaker in the centre of the lounge.

"Hey, Kearns," it said in a puzzled rasp. "Brian Kearns, come on up forward, will you? Kearns, please come up to the front control room, if you can."

Brian scowled, and started painfully unbuckling the straps on his skyhook. "Now what does Mellen want —" he wondered aloud.

"What's the matter?" Judy squeaked, "Are we in trouble?"

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"Oh, hush!" Ellie commanded. "If we are, we'll be told!" She watched, with vague disquiet, as Brian crawled over the side of his skyhook and abruptly tumbled two feet, not very hard, to the floor. "Weight's on the axis now," he announced wryly to no one in particular. "Good thing I wasn't up where Judy is, or I'd have broken my neck! Somebody will have to lift her down —"

Judy squeaked again, but Ellie snapped at her: "Just stay where you are until we find out what's going on!" and watched, disturbed, as Brian crawled clumsily on hands and knees across the wall which lay along the central axis of the starship and was therefore "down." He pushed at the refractory sphincter lock — it worked perfectly only in free fall — and forced his head and shoulders through into the forward control room.

Tom Mellen, his short hair bristling upright around his head, twisted around as Brian wriggled his shoulders through. "We've tried to raise them by FM, AM and wavicle," he said, scowling, "but they don't answer. Not a sign of a signal. What do you think of that, Brian?"

Brian looked deliberately around the cabin. Paula Sandoval, strapped in before the navigation instruments, hunched her bare, tanned shoulders and refused to meet his eyes; Caldwell, the gray-haired veteran who had repaired the atomic rockets, grinned truculently. Mellen's face was puzzled and defensive.

"I said it off Mars," Brian told them, "and I say it again; we're just wasting time trying to raise them with any communication devices aboard. By now, they're probably using something so far beyond radio or wavicles that they can't pick us up. Their equipment would be too fine for our clumsy primitive devices to —"

"Clumsy primitive —" Caldwell broke off, visibly summoning patience, and Mellen interrupted fiercely. "Look, Kearns, there are just so many ways of transmitting electric impulses."

"The first spacemen said that all fuels had to be chemical or atomic, didn't they?" Brian snapped. "And we came on cerberum. The world didn't end when the *Starward* left! You've got to realize that we've been stranded in what amounts to a time-warp for five hundred years or so, and we're hopelessly obsolete!"

"Maybe so . . ." Mellen said slowly, and waggled the switch again. Brian irritably flipped it shut.

"Why keep fussing with it, Tom? If they'd picked up our signals, they'd have answered by now. Have you seen any rockets entering or leaving?"

"Nothing larger than twelve centimeters since we entered the orbit," Mellen told him.

Brian frowned. "Where are we, Paula?"

The girl gave him a venomous

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look, but she glanced at her instruments and replied, "Orbiting at forty miles, velocity five point six m.p.s."

Kearns glanced at Caldwell. "You're the captain —"

"In a limited sense," Caldwell said slowly, and returned his steady gaze. "That's why I wanted you up here. There are two things we can do. We can go down under the cloud layer — and maybe risk getting shot at — to find a place to set down, or else go on a permanent orbit, and send somebody down in the pickup."

"The pickup," Brian decided immediately. "Can you imagine trying to land a ship this size without instructions from outside? For all we know, there may be laws about landing spaceships. The pickup can set down in a few square yards. Whoever goes down can locate a spaceport big enough to handle the *Homeward* and see about getting the necessary permissions."

"You're overlooking one thing." Mellen forced the words out. "Suppose they haven't any spaceports!"

"They'd have to have spaceports, Tom," Caldwell protested, "even for interplanetary ships." And Brian added, "It's impossible that we'd have been the only interstellar ship —"

"That isn't what I mean," Mellen protested. "Surely one of the planets, Mars or Earth, would have picked up our signals. Someone must use radio for something, even if it's purely local. That is, if there's anyone down there at all!"

Brian snorted laughter. "You mean some kind of end-of-the-world disaster?" he asked, elaborately sarcastic, but Mellen took him seriously. "Something like that."

"There's one way we can find out," Caldwell interrupted, "Do you want to take the pickup down, Brian? We won't be using the IS drives again — there's nothing more you can do aboard."

"I'll go," Brian said shortly, but he could barely conceal his eagerness, and even forgot his animosity toward Mellen for a minute. "Shall I take Tom to handle the radio?"

Caldwell frowned, and answered half practically and half tactfully, "I'll need Tom, and Paula too, to bring the ship down when we're ready. Langdon can handle the radio in the pickup. And take a couple of others too; Mellen may or may not be right, but I don't think any crew members ought to go down alone until we know exactly what we'll find down there."

Caldwell's seriousness made little impression on Brian, but he realized that he would need someone to pilot the pickup in any case; his own training had fitted him only to handle the complex interstellar drives. And Langdon should, they decided, keep the radio at his fingertips, to report instantly to the *Homeward* in case of any unforeseen events.

So it was Ellinor Wade who took the controls of the small jet-driven

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stratoplane which had been designed for ship-to-surface shuttling, and used during the final stages of repair on the *Homeward*. She let the small plane sink through the thick clouds, and asked, "Where do we want to set down?"

Langdon bent over the carefully copied map. "Judy's scribbled all over this thing," he complained. "But try North America, midwest. That's where the first rocket ranges were built, and we all speak English, after a fashion."

"Unless the language has changed too much," Brian murmured. Ellie frowned as she brought the swift little jet down, arcing across an unfamiliar land-mass; Brian and Langdon squeezed their hands to their eyes as the clouds thinned, for the sudden blaze of yellow light was like a stab in the eyeballs. Lighting aboard ship, of course, was keyed to the familiar crimson noon of Terra Two, under which the crew had lived all their lives. Ellie squinted over the instrument panel, using an unladylike word under her breath.

The ship dived over rolling hills, and Brian let out his breath slowly as the serried regular skyline of massive buildings cleaved the horizon, and said in an edgy voice, "I was beginning to wonder if Mellen had been right about those atomic deserts!"

Ellie warned, "From what the Firsts have told us, I don't care to get tangled up in a city airport! Let's find an open space and set down there." She headed northward from the city, and asked, "Have either of you seen anything that looks like transportation? Planes, rockets, anything on the ground?"

"Nothing at all with the naked eye," Langdon frowned, "and nothing moving that beeps the radar. And I've been watching pretty close."

"Funny . . ." Ellie murmured.

From this height everything was clear, and as they swerved groundward, details became sharply incised in miniature: wide plowed fields, scattered, toy-like houses, clusters of small buildings. There seemed to be animals in the fields. Langdon smiled. "Just like home," he said happily, meaning Terra Two. "Regular rural community, except that everything looks *green!*"

"That's this ridiculous yellow light!" Ellie said, absently, and Brian scoffed, "Just like home! Better get set for a shock, Langdon!"

"It might be you that gets the shock," Langdon answered unexpectedly, and peered over Ellie's shoulder at the controls. "The ground's level here, Ellie."

The pickup bumped ground and rolled gently; Langdon's fingers moved delicately on the radio panel, and he made a brief report in staccato speech while Brian unsealed the door. Strange smells wafted into the cabin, and the three crowded together in the entrance, eyes squinted against the stabbing

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light, strangely reluctant, at the last, to set foot on the unfamiliar soil.

"It's cold. . . ." Ellie shivered in her thin garment.

Langdon looked down, dismayed. "You've set down in somebody's grainfield!" he reproached. Food was still conserved carefully on Terra Two, more from habit than from serious privation; Man's conquest of the new planet was uncertain, and the colony took no chances. The three felt a twinging guilt as they looked down at the blackened spears of grain, and Ellie clutched at Brian's arm. "Someone's coming —" she faltered.

Across the evenly plowed ridges, between rows of ripening wheat, a boy of thirteen walked, steadily and unhurried. He was not very tall, but looked sturdy; his face was deeply tanned under square-cut dark hair, and he was wearing a loose shirt and breeches tucked into low boots, all the same rich deep-brown color. Even Brian was silent as the boy advanced to the very foot of the pickup plane, paused and looked up at it, then glanced up indifferently at the three in the doorway, and began to move around to the tail, toward the smoking jets.

Brian quickly dropped Ellie's hand and scrambled to the ground. "Hey there!" he called, forgetting the prepared speech on his lips. "Better not go around there, it's dangerous — *hot!*"

The boy desisted at once, turning to gaze at him, and after a moment he said in slurred but perfectly understandable English, "I saw the streak, and hoped that a meteor had fallen." He laughed, turned and began to walk away from them.

Brian looked blankly up at Ellie and Langdon. The man jumped down and gave Ellie a hand as she called after the boy "Please — wait a minute —"

He looked around, politely, and before his indifferent courtesy Brian felt the words melting from his lips. It was Langdon who finally said, in an empty voice, "Where can we — We have a message for the — the Government. Where can we get — transportation — to the City?"

"The City?" The boy stared. "What for? Where did you come from? The — the *City?*"

Brian quietly assumed command of the situation again. "We are from the first Centaurian expedition, the *Starward*," he said. "We, or rather our ship, left this planet hundreds of years ago."

"Oh?" The boy smiled in a friendly way. "Well, I suppose you are glad to be back. Over that hill," he pointed, "you will find a road which goes toward the City." He turned again, this time with a definite air of finality, and started to walk away.

The three travelers stared at one another in blank indignation. Brian finally took a step forward and shouted: "Hey, come back here!"

With an irritated jerk of his head,

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the boy turned. "*Now* what do you want?" he demanded.

Ellie said conciliatingly, "This is only the pickup of our ship. We have to — to find someone who can tell us where to bring the spaceship down. As you can see," she gestured toward the ruined wheat, "our jets have destroyed a part of the crop here. Our spaceship is much larger, and we don't want to do any more damage. Perhaps your father —"

The boy's face, puzzled at first, had cleared while she was talking. "My father is not in our village now," he informed them, "but if you will come with me, I will take you to my grandfather."

"If you could tell us where the nearest spaceport is —" Brian suggested.

The boy frowned. "Spaceport?" he repeated. "Well, maybe my grandfather can help you."

He turned again, and led the way across the field. Langdon and Ellie followed at once; Brian hung back, looking uneasily at the pickup. The boy glanced over his shoulder. "You need not be anxious about your plane," he called, laughing. "It's too large to be stolen!"

Brian stiffened; the boy's attitude was just derisive enough to put him on the defensive. Then, realizing the futility of anger, he broke into a run to catch up with the others. When he came near them, the boy was saying, a little sulkily, "I thought that I would be fortunate enough to find a fallen meteor! I have never seen a meteorite." Then, making a tardy attempt to remember his manners, he added politely, "Of course, I have never seen a spaceship either —" but it was evident that a spaceship was a very poor substitute.

Ellie's thinly shod feet stumbled on the uneven ground, and all three were glad when they came out on a smoothed road which wound between low flowering trees. There seemed to be no vehicles of any kind for the road was just wide enough to permit the four to walk abreast. The boy's walk was rapid, and he kept moving, almost unconsciously, ahead of them, then looking back and deliberately slowing his steps. Once when he had forged ahead, Langdon murmured, "Evidently vehicular traffic has been completely diverted from rural neighborhoods!" and Brian whispered, "This is incredible! Either that boy's half-witted, or else even the children here are so blasé that the first star-expedition doesn't mean anything to them!"

"I wouldn't be too sure," Ellie said slowly. "There's something that we don't understand. Let's not try to figure things out ahead, Brian. Let's just take them as they come."

## III

Muscles virtually unused for nearly five years were aching by the time the narrow road wound into a village of low clustered houses,

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built of what seemed to be grayish field stone. A profuse display of flowers bloomed in elaborate geometrical patterns around nearly every doorstep, and little groups of children, dressed in smocks of dark yellow or pale reddish-gray, were chasing one another haphazardly on the lawns, shouting something rhythmic and untuneful. Most of the houses had low trellised porches, and women in short light dresses sat in little groups on the porches. The street was not paved, and the women did not appear busy; their low-pitched conversation was a musical hum, and all down the street the three strangers could hear a sound of singing. A man's voice, singing in a low, monotonous rise and fall of notes. It was toward this sound of singing that the boy led them, up the steps of a porch which was not trellised but roofed, and through an open door.

They stepped into a wide, light room. Two walls seemed to open in slatted shutters, giving a view of an evenly patterned garden; on another wall was a large fireplace, where embers flickered quietly, and there was a gleaming kettle of some light, brilliant metal swung on a crane over the embers. It reminded Brian of a picture in one of his oldest history books, and he blinked at the anachronism. The other furniture in the room was unfamiliar, low cushioned seats built against the walls, and a few closed doors on the fourth wall. From an inner room, the singing filled the house: a baritone voice, rich and resonant, rising and falling in slow, unfamiliar harmonic patterns.

The boy called: "Grandpa!"

The singer finished one of the odd phrases; then the song ceased, and the three strangers heard slow, deliberate steps behind the closed door. It swung back, and a tall old man came out into the main room.

He looked like the boy. His hair was clipped short, but grew down along his cheeks, although his chin was shaven clean; he wore a shirt and breeches of the same rich brown, but his feet were thrust into slippers of stitched leather. He looked strong and vigorous; his hands, tanned and knotty, were extremely well-kept, though somewhat stained, and he stood very erect, surveying them with great composure, while his deep-set dark eyes studied them from their clipped and tended hair to their rubber-sandaled feet. The composure gradually gave way to a quizzical smile, and he came forward a few steps. His voice was a singer's voice, full and very strong.

"Be welcome, friends. You are at home. Destry, who are our guests?"

The boy said calmly "They came down in a spaceship, grandpa, or rather, part of one. That streak wasn't a meteor at all. They said they wanted to go to the City. So I brought them along to you instead."

The man's face did not change by a fraction. Brian had been looking for surprise, or some more tangible

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emotion, but the man only surveyed them equably.

"Please be seated," he invited graciously. "I am Hard Frobisher, friends, and this is my grandson Destry."

The three sank on one of the cushioned seats, feeling a little like children in their first learning-period before the Firsts. Only Brian had presence of mind enough to murmur their names.

"Brian Kearns — Ellinor Wade — Langdon Forbes —"

The old man repeated the names, bowing courteously to Ellie, at which the girl could barely conceal her amazement. He inquired, smiling, "Can I be of assistance to you?"

Brian stood up. "The boy didn't tell you, sir, but we're from the first Centaurus expedition — the *Starward.*"

"Oh?" A faint flicker of interest crossed Hard Frobisher's face. "That was a good long time ago, I am told. Did the Barbarians have some means, then, of prolonging life beyond its appointed limits?"

Brian's patience had already gone a long way beyond its appointed limits, and now, abruptly, it deserted him.

"Look, sir. We're from the first expedition into interstellar space. The *first.* None of us left Earth on the *Starward.* We weren't born. Our hyperspeeds, if you know what they are — which I'm beginning to doubt — threw us into a time-lag. There's no need to call us Barbarians, either. The ship's drives were smashed when they landed, and we've been four generations, *four generations*, getting it in operable condition to come back to Earth. None of us has ever been on Earth before. We're strangers here, understand? We have to ask our way around. We asked a civil question. Now if we could kindly have a civil answer —"

Hard Frobisher raised a placating hand. "I am sorry," he said calmly. "I didn't understand. Just what do you want me to do about it?"

Brian made a visible attempt to keep his temper. "Well, first, we want to get in touch with the authorities. Then I want to find a place where we can bring out spaceship down —"

Frobisher was frowning, and Brian fell silent.

"Frankly," the old man said, "I don't know whom you'd contact about a thing like that. There is plenty of open land to the south, nearer the city, where you might land your ship —"

"Now look —" Brian started, but Langdon touched his arm. So Brian only asked, "If you could tell us how to get in touch with the Government . . . ?"

"Well," the old man said neutrally," there are three governors in our village, but they only regulate the school hours, and make rules about locking houses. I wouldn't want to bother them about something foolish like this. I don't think

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they'd have much to say about your . . . oh yes, spaceship."

That silenced Brian and Langdon completely. Ellie, feeling as if they were being tangled into a giant spiderweb, asked desperately, "Could we go to some other, perhaps some larger place?"

Frobisher looked at her, frankly puzzled.

"It's half a day's walk to Camey," he said, "and when you got there, they would tell you the same thing. You are perfectly welcome to put your spaceship down on our barrens, if you want to."

Brian stiffened belligerently. "Now let's get this straight. There's a city over there. There must be some one there in authority!"

"Oh, the City!" Frobisher's voice held dismissal, "Nobody's lived in any of the cities for years! Why would you want to go there?"

Langdon said, baffled, "Look, Mr. Frobisher. We've come all the way from Centaurus, to bring Earth the news about our expedition. We'd expected to be surprised at what we found — after all, it has been a long time since the *Starward* left. But are we supposed to understand from this run-around you're giving us that there's nobody to listen, that the first of the interstellar expeditions doesn't mean anything to anyone?"

"Should it?" asked Frobisher, and his face was even more baffled than Brian's. "I can understand your personal predicament somewhat — after all, you've come a long way, but why? Didn't you like it where you were? There is only one reason why people move from one place to another — and it seems to me that you have overdone it."

The room was silent. Hard Frobisher stood up, looking indecisively at his guests, and Brian half expected him to repeat Destry's move and walk away, uninterested; but he merely went to the fireplace and peered into the kettle.

"Food is prepared," he remarked. "Can I invite you to join us? Good food is ill-seasoned by dissension, and there is no wisdom in an empty belly."

Brian and Langdon just sat and looked dumbly at Frobisher. It was Ellie who said firmly, "Thank you, Mr. Frobisher," and dug an elbow into Brian's ribs, whispering savagely, "Behave yourself!"

The boy Destry came and helped his grandfather bring food from the fireplace and from an inner room; he conducted the strangers to seats around a sort of table. The food was unfamiliar and not altogether pleasant to the strangers, accustomed to the elaborate synthetics of the ship; Brian, altogether out of humor, made almost no effort to conceal his distaste, and Langdon ate listlessly; Hard and Destry ate with the unfeigned appetite of men who spend much time in the open air, and neither spoke much during the meal except to urge food upon their

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guests. Ellie, finding the curious liquids and semi-solids fascinating, if strange, tasted them with an interested professional curiosity, wondering how they were prepared.

It was not very long before Hard Frobisher nodded to Destry, and the boy rose and began taking dishes from the table. Frobisher pushed back his chair and turned to Brian. "We can now discuss your problem, if you wish," he said pleasantly. "Full stomachs make wise decisions." He glanced at Ellie, smiling. "I regret that there is no woman in my house to entertain you while we talk, young lady," he said regretfully, and Ellie dropped her eyes. On the *Homeward* — as on Terra Two — men and women were equals and neither deferred to the other. Hard's polite deference was new, and his bland assumption that she could have no part in their talk was a somewhat distasteful surprise. Langdon clenched his fists, while Brian seemed about to explode. Ellie summed up the situation at a glance, and swiftly intervened by rising and glancing shyly at Destry. "Can I help you?" she offered diffidently, the boy grinned.

"Sure, come ahead," he told her. "You carry the dishes and I'll bring the kettle."

Frobisher settled back, taking a leather pouch from his pocket and meticulously stuffing a pipe of carved amber which swiftly revised Langdon's ideas of the present level of civilization. Smoking was a habit on Terra Two as well; only the smell of the tobacco was unfamiliar. Both young men stifled coughs and refused his offer of the sack, taking out their own grayish cigarettes and inhaling the sweetish-sour smoke avidly to shut out the rank stench of the pipe. Somewhere, behind closed doors, they heard a splashing of water and the uncertain falsetto of the boy's voice, mingled with Ellie's merry soprano laughter. Brian scowled and leaned forward, his arms on his knees.

"See here, Mr. Frobisher," he said truculently. "I know you are trying to be hospitable, but if you don't mind, let's talk business. We have to bring the ship down, and after that —" He stopped and stared at the floor, wondering suddenly if he were on some kind of reservation for half-wits. No: the room was tastefully, if simply, furnished; everything was plain, but nothing crude. The wood of the furniture was beautifully stained and polished, and the hand-woven rug on the floor matched the thick draperies at the slatted windows. The house showed comfort, even a moderated luxury, and Frobisher's accents were those of a cultured man. Nor was he merely an eccentric, judging from what Brian had briefly seen of the other houses and the glimpsed people. Destry hadn't seemed surprised at the plane — he'd known what it was, and yet it hadn't impressed him. No, it wasn't savagery. But it was radically different from what

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he had expected, and the change bewildered him. He looked up at one of the many pictures which hung about the room, and there, for the first time, sensed a note of eccentricity; they were mostly sketches of birds, very precisely drawn, but the colors were combined in a fashion which only a madman could endure. . . . Then Brian realized that it was this bright, unfamiliar light which made the colors bizarre to him, and simultaneously he became conscious that his eyes were stinging and watering, and that he had a violent headache. He rested his forehead on his clenched hands, closing his eyes.

"It isn't that you aren't welcome here," Frobisher said thoughtfully, pulling at his pipe. "We realize that there is only one reason why you would leave your home planet, and that would, of course, be because you were unhappy there. And so we understand —"

"Of all the stupid, unjustified assumptions—" Brian began furiously, then checked himself. What was happening to his caution? He and Langdon were effectively cut off from the rest of the crew; they couldn't afford to get into trouble. He rubbed his aching eyes.

"Sorry, Mr. Frobisher," he said tiredly. "I didn't mean to be offensive."

"No offense taken," Frobisher assured him. "And certainly none was intended by me. Am I mistaken —"

"We came here for one reason," Langdon informed him. "To advance man's knowledge of the world outside the solar system. In other words, to finish what the Firsts started."

"And, judging by appearances—" Brian's voice was bitter "— we've wasted our time!"

"Yes, I'm afraid you have." Something new in Frobisher's voice made both young men look up. "Whether you realize it or not, I am quite aware of your problems, Mr. Kearns. I have read a good deal about the Bar — excuse me, about the past." He tapped his pipe meditatively on a projecting corner of the fireplace. "I suppose it would be impossible for you to return to Centaurus in your lifetimes?"

Brian bit his lip. "In our lifetimes — no, not impossible," he answered, "but in the lifetimes of anyone we had known, assuming that we could *get* back. Our fuel reserves are not great —" He looked questioningly at Frobisher.

"Then I don't quite know what to do with you," the old man said, and there was a genuine personal concern in his voice. And that friendly concern was the last thing needed to bring Brian to critical mass. Ignoring the warning pressure of Langdon's hand on his knee, he stood up.

"Look, Frobisher," he said tensely, "just who in hell gave you the authority to make this decision, anyhow?"

Frobisher's face did not change by

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a fraction. "Why, you landed in our field and my grandson brought you here."

"So you're just taking responsibility for the whole matter? Do you rule Earth?"

The man's mouth dropped open. "*Do I rule* . . . Ha, ha, ha!" Frobisher leaned back in his chair, holding his sides and rocking suddenly with uncontrollable laughter. "*Do I rule* . . ." He collapsed into chuckles again, his mirth literally shaking the floor, and the large expansive laughter was so infectious that Langdon finally glanced up with a faint, puzzled grin, and even the worst of Brian's fury began to drain away a little. "I'm sorry," Frobisher said weakly at last, and there were tears in his eyes. "But that — that is the funniest thing I've heard since spring sowing! *Do I* . . . ha, ha, ha, ha! *Wait* until I tell my son — I'm sorry, Mr. Kearns, I can't help it. *Do I rule Earth!*" he chuckled again, "Heavens forbid! I have enough trouble ruling my grandson!" He laughed again, irrepressibly. Brian couldn't see what was so funny and said so.

With an effort, Frobisher controlled his laughter and his eyes sobered — but not much — as he looked at Brian. "You did come to me," he pointed out, "and that makes it my responsibility. I'm not a man to evade responsibility or refuse you hospitality, but frankly, I wish you had found somebody else!" A tiny snort of laughter escaped him again, "I can see you'll make trouble here! But if you don't listen to me, you'll only have to find somebody else, and I'm afraid that whoever you found would tell you just about the same thing!" He smiled, and the anxious friendliness in his face took the edge from Brian's anger, although annoyed puzzlement remained.

Frobisher added quietly, "There is no reason that Norten village shouldn't have this problem, as well as any other." He stood up. "I expect the remainder of your ship's crew will be anxious about you. Do I assume correctly that you have a communication device?" At Langdon's exasperated nod, Frobisher twitched a loose coat from a peg. "Then why not report to them? We can talk further on the way — you don't mind if I come, do you?"

"No, not at all," Brian said weakly. "Not at all."

## IV

Mindful of Caldwell's words about not getting separated, Brian insisted that Ellie should accompany them back to the pickup. Destry, apparently uninterested, at first refused his grandfather's invitation to join them, then changed his mind. He ran to fetch a warm jacket, but, surprisingly, instead of donning it, he laid it about Ellie's shoulders. "She's cold," he explained briefly to his grandfather, and without waiting for thanks, strode ahead of them, along the road.

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The sun was dropping westward, and the light was almost unbearable; Brian's eyes were squinted tight, and Langdon's forehead furrowed in deep-plowed lines; Ellie held one hand across her forehead, and Brian put his arm around her.

"Headache, darling?" he asked tenderly.

She grimaced. "Will we get used to this light, do you think, or are we going to have to put up with this all along?"

Langdon said wryly, "I suppose the Firsts felt like this under Theta Centauri!"

Ellie smiled faintly. "No one spread out a welcome for them."

Frobisher walked ahead of them, with long, swinging steps, and Brian said in a savage undertone, "I still think this whole thing is an elaborate bluff of some sort. Or else we're on a primitive reservation. The whole world *can't* be like this!"

"Oh, don't be silly, Ellie said wearily, rubbing her aching eyes. "How could anyone have known that we'd choose to land here?"

Some of the women on the porches called familiarly to Frobisher, and he waved gaily to them in return, but no one paid any attention to the strangers, except for one plump woman, her hair in curly sausages all over her head, who waddled from her steps and toward the road. "I see you have guests, Hard," she called cheerfully. "If your house is too full, mine is empty!"

Frobisher faced around, smiling. "Your hospitality may be required," he said. "There are others, and they have come a long way."

The woman looked at Ellie with a sharp female glance, noting her fair cropped hair, the smooth spun-synthetic coverall beneath the boy's jacket, the molded sandals and bare legs. Then she put out a fat warm hand. "Are you planning to settle in our village, my dear?" she asked.

"They haven't decided," Frobisher answered noncommittally, but Ellie said with a shy, impulsive friendliness, "I do hope so!" and squeezed the offered hand.

"Well, I hope so too, dear. It isn't often we have young neighbors," the plump woman replied. "You and your husband" (Ellie blushed at the forthright archaism) "be sure and call on us, now, if you need anything before you get settled." She smiled and waddled back to her doorway.

Langdon said, low-voiced, "It's like being on Terra Two, except that everything — everything —"

Brian said, "There must have been some inconceivable disaster! Culturally, they're a thousand years behind the world when the *Starward* left. Why, even Terra Two is more civilized than they seem to be! Cooking with fire — and these little villages — and the cities empty —"

"Oh, I don't know," Ellie murmured surprisingly. "How do you measure culture? Isn't it possible that they've progressed in ways we don't know anything about? The

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difference might be in viewpoint."

Brian shook his head stubbornly. "It's regression," he protested, but Ellie had no time to answer, for they had come within sight of the pickup, and Frobisher dropped back to walk with them.

"There is your plane," he said. "Do you intend to communicate from here, or will you rejoin your spaceship?"

Brian and Langdon looked at one another. "We haven't thought about it," Langdon said at last, "but — Brian — without a spaceport or at least a radio beaming device, how are they going to land?"

Brian frowned. "I don't know much about rockets," he said at last; "the hyperdrives are my job. How much landing room do they need?"

Langdon said, troubled, "Paula and Caldwell, between them, could land the *Homeward* in great-grandfather Kearns's biochemistry lab, if they had to, without breaking a test tube. But they'd have to have a fix. If they land blind, they're apt to set down right on the village." He paused, and clarified, "That is, if they just aim at our general direction from what we transmit here."

"In that case," Brian suggested, "we'd better take up the pickup and rejoin the ship — and hunt up a good big desert to land blind."

"Rejoining the ship would be quite a problem in this light," Ellie said, troubled. "It's going to be dark in less than an hour, I'd say — and I have a feeling that we're going to find ourselves completely night-blind."

Frobisher had considerately withdrawn while they were talking, and Brian snapped, "What's the matter with your brain, Ellie? You can go around to sunward, and match velocities with the *Homeward* there!"

"But then we might not find this place again," Langdon said surprisingly, and Ellie added, "If we go hurtling all around the planet, who knows if we'd find this again?"

"For the love of — who *cares*?"

"I do," said Langdon firmly. "According to Frobisher, conditions are pretty much the same everywhere, and — I kind of like that old guy, Brian. I like it here. I'd like to land here. Maybe settle down here."

Brian stared. "Are you crazy?"

Langdon said, "Not at all. If we want to look around after the *Homeward* is down, fine — we have the pickup, we can do all the exploring we want to. We've plenty of fuel for the pickup. We're down, let's stay down."

Brian's face lost a little of its self-confidence; it was the first time that any of the crew had ever questioned his judgment, although many had resented his methods. He shrugged in a sudden futile misery. "I'm outvoted! And anyhow I resigned command when the atomics went on! Settle it with Caldwell by radio!" He lurched away from them and around toward the other side of the pickup. He heard the staccato bark

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of the radio inside, but paid no attention until he suddenly became conscious of Ellie, close beside him.

She raised her face, with an affectionate smile. Brian, even distracted by a thousand irritated thoughts, found time to wonder at the new mystery of her fair hair in the golden sun: the red was dimmed out, here, and the short curls seemed a pure, delicate silver; she was very white and fragile in this new light, and Brian reached impulsively to pull her close. She responded eagerly, her arms going around him and her face lifted with a simplicity that he had not quite expected.

"Journey's end," she said gently. "We've waited a long time for this, Brian, even if that electronic calculator was off-beam about what we'd find down here. Kiss me, you idiot."

The strength in his arms was astonishing, and she gave a little cry. "Hey, I'm not used to weighing so much, take it easy—" she protested, laughing, and the laughter trailed away as he bent his head down to hers. She was conscious of the sun in her eyes, of the physical fatigue from unaccustomed exercise, and the dragging feel of too much gravity—Terra Two was a small, light world. There was a crushing urgency in Brian's arms, and he strained her desperately close for a frantic minute, then abruptly pushed her away, his voice roughened.

"Where did Frobisher go? Damn it, Ellie, I need a clear head right now! The way it looks, we'll have the rest of our lives for that kind of thing!"

Hurt, but sensing the plea for help that begged her from behind the facade of his taut control, Ellie swallowed the pain of the personal rejection, and forced herself to think beyond the immediate moment. "He and Destry went to see how much of the grain had been ruined—"

"Hell, we can pay for the grain. There they come now—" Brian kicked out at a stalk of wheat, a curiously futile movement, and said in an odd, quenched voice, looking at his foot, "It's going to take months for us to get back in shape, after so long in free fall. We're coordinated all wrong for so much gravity. Notice the way Frobisher walks? Like he owned the world—" Resentment and envy mingled in his voice, and he stopped, then finished in a surprised tone, "—or as much of it as he wants!"

He said abruptly as the grandfather and grandson joined them, "Mr. Frobisher, we'll be glad to pay for what wheat we ruined."

"I would not have mentioned it," Frobisher said, and for the first time there was something like respect in his voice, "but it shows a good spirit that *you* have mentioned it. I have abundance, and you will have much to do after your crew lands. But if you insist upon payment, you can contribute task-work next season, after you are settled."

Brian was puzzled, but decided not to press the point. Langdon re-

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joined them, and he asked, "What did Caldwell say?"

"He'll try it, if we'll fix up some kind of radio beam," Langdon responded. "Where do you want us to land, Mr. Frobisher?"

Hard Frobisher began to draw a sketch-map with a long stick in the dirt. "Over that rise —"

"We'll move the pickup over there," Ellie decided, then abruptly proffered the invitation, "Ride over there with us?"

Hard Frobisher looked speculatively at the plane, then toward the horizon. "Oh, it isn't a long walk," he said, but Destry said eagerly, "I believe I'd like it, grandpa."

The old man smiled deprecatingly. "The young are enthusiastic, Miss Wade," he said, almost in apology, "but — very well."

Brian logged another point of bewilderment. Could any educated humans be so trusting? Even on Terra Two, a well-united colony, there was a certain individual wariness, and strangers — how did Frobisher and Destry know they wouldn't be kidnaped?

It was an incredible relief to get back inside the pickup and switch on the familiar crimson light. Destry expressed mild surprise at the lighting, but Frobisher asked no questions and did not seem impressed when the pickup rose straight upward and circled before relanding at the edge of the large barren tract where they were to bring the *Homeward* down. At only one point in the whole maneuver did Frobisher show the slightest surprise, and that was when Ellie took the controls; he glanced at Brian, then at Langdon, and then, in frank amazement, at the small slim girl at the controls; but he made no comment.

They landed, and Langdon touched the radio. Brian took it from his hand. "Hello? Hello the *Homeward?* Kearns talking. That you, Tom?"

Tom Mellen's husky voice, very far away, asked thinly, "Was I right about no spaceports?"

"You were." Brian did not elaborate.

"We've got the direction of your beam. But Paula says if we follow it in, we'll land straight on the pickup. And if we don't, how are we going to hit the spot you've picked out for us?" Tom sounded puzzled. "In the last few seconds of braking, this hulk isn't very easy to steer."

"Hell!" Brian swore. "Hold on a minute!" He explained the situation briefly to Langdon. "I told you so!"

Langdon said grimly, "There's only one way to handle it. Take the fuel out of the pickup — impact would blow it up — move it out where we want them to land, and let them land on it. The pickup's expendable. The crew isn't. They'd land hard, but the crew will be in skyhooks, and Caldwell in a crash cockpit. Nobody'll be hurt."

"We're going to need the pickup later," Brian argued stubbornly.

"Well, have you a better idea?"

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Langdon asked. "If they follow the beam in part way, and try to swerve in the last few seconds, they're apt to miscalculate by a degree or two, and burn up the village."

"I still think we ought to hunt up a good-sized desert," Brian insisted.

Destry interrupted suddenly, in a tone of disgust, "Say, when you want a kingfisher to dive, you throw a hunk of bread where you want him to dive — you don't stand and hold it! If your radio — what is it — beam comes from that," he gestured at the transmitter, "why not just rip that thing out of the plane, fix it to send out a steady signal, and take it out where you want your spaceship to land? It won't hurt the spaceship to land on anything that small, will it?"

Brian stared at the boy in amazement for a minute, and Langdon's mouth dropped open.

"Destry," Ellie said after a brief silence, "*you* have the makings of a scientist."

"Look, the boy said uncomfortably. "The idea may not be much good, but why insult me?"

"It *is* good," Langdon interrupted. "I don't know why I didn't think of it myself, except that I'm half-witted in this light! Brian, that's *it*. Ellie, while I send word to Mellen — before I rip this out — get under the seat and find the radio kit; I may have to resolder a few wires. Looks like we'll be in the dark by the time we finish, too; better get out the small lamps. Come on, get busy —" He flipped the switch open. "*Homeward?* Forbes speaking. Tom? Listen, in about twenty minutes we'll have a fix set up —"

Brian and Ellie were struggling to lift the heavy seat; the unaccustomed gravity made it almost impossible to budge. Destry caught one end and heaved it up easily, and Ellie and Brian bent over the equipment stored there. The girl murmured in Brian's ear, "There goes your theory about regression! That kid knew what he was talking about."

Brian snorted. "And used an analogy from natural history! It was obvious enough, knowing the purpose of the radio. If either Langdon or I had been thinking, we'd have hit on it."

Ellie did not answer; there seemed no use in making Brian angry again. She went and stood watching Langdon working swiftly and expertly to dismantle and readjust the radio set to emit a self-contained, steady signal. He had to switch on the lights in the pickup before he finished, and before the impromptu homing device was completed, the sun had gone down. As they stood in the doorway of the pickup, Langdon scowled.

"I can't see my hand before my eyes!" he protested, and took one of the small red handlamps Ellie handed him. He looked at it disgustedly. "I can set the signal up with this, yes — but I don't know

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the lay of the land!" He gestured to the vast empty tract of barren land, and added, "I'll get lost out there, or set it up on a side hill!"

Destry volunteered: "I know this place like my own hand — I'll come along and find you a flat space."

"Need any help?" Brian offered, but Langdon shook his head. "No thanks. No sense in both of us getting tangled up in this murk." He picked up the homing device and, with Destry, moved away across the field which, to Brian and Ellie, was inky-dark, although in actuality it was bathed in clear moonlight. They stood in the door of the pick-up, straining their eyes for the reddish, bobbing glimmer of Langdon's light, and Ellie shuddered in the rough warmth of Destry's coat. Brian's arm stole round her in the darkness.

She said tremulously "What would have happened if we'd gone in at Mars!"

Frobisher, behind them, drew a harsh breath. "You're certainly lucky you didn't!" he said thankfully. "You couldn't have lived there three days, unless you stayed with your ship — I assume the ship is self-contained?"

"Oh, yes," Brian told him. "But — Mars was a sizable colony when the *Starward* left!"

Frobisher shrugged. "Everybody came in from Mars before the spacers stopped running. There's no water there at all, now."

Brian murmured, ". . . and by now you should have had all the planets colonized, and reached most of the nearer stars!"

The older man's voice lost its pleasant inflection. "You say some very surprising things, Mr. Kearns," he said dryly. "You don't say that we *could* have colonized the planets — which, of course, is true — but that we *should* have. Do you mind telling me why? The planets are not exactly suited for human habitation, except this one — and I would hate to have to live on any other."

Brian asked almost savagely "You mean there is *no* space travel?"

"Why, no," Frobisher said slowly. "No one cares to go to the planets."

"But . . . the planets had already been reached, conquered, when the *Starward* left!"

Frobisher shrugged. "The Barbarians did a great many things which we regard as stupid," he said. "But why should it be called conquest, to encourage men to go out to worlds for which they are not biologically adapted? I have read much about the Barbarians, their insatiable egotism, their idle, childish curiosity, their continual escapism and refusal to face their problems, but — forgive me for saying this, no personal offense is intended — I had never believed it until today!"

Ellie took Brian's arm before he could answer. "Look there, Langdon's signaling — they must have the transmitter set up," she said, and moved her lamp in a wide circle. Before long, Langdon and

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Destry emerged from the bath of inky darkness, and sank down on the ground, in the little flood of reddish light from the pickup's windows. "That did it," Langdon said. "Now we sit and wait while Paula pinpoints the beam, and Caldwell will put her down right where we want."

"I hope somebody remembers to look after Einstein," Ellie worried. "I'd hate to have him break his neck in the last few seconds of the trip!"

"Judy will take care of him," Langdon reassured, and they waited in the red-cast darkness. Brian was mustering all the arguments he had heard from the Firsts about the necessity that had backed developing space travel.

"What about overpopulation? What about diminishing food supplies and natural resources?"

Frobisher's laugh was loud in the darkness. "Certainly not even the Barbarians expected to find natural food supplies on Mars or Venus!" he chuckled. "Interstellar travel might have solved it, but at prohibitive cost. Still, once man decided to stop squandering natural resources on vast theoretical projects, and throwing them irrecoverably out into space, that problem was easily solved."

"But what forced the decision?" Brian asked almost timidly.

"I wouldn't know," Frobisher said thoughtfully, "but when a decision is really necessary, as a rule, some one makes it. Probably the overpopulation reached such extremes — the solar system as a whole, of course, since Earth had to feed Mars and Venus too — that for one or two whole generations, every able-bodied man and woman had to put all his efforts into food-making instead of theoretical astronomy or whatever they called it. And by the time they had that problem solved, people were thinking of science in terms of human benefits, and probably realized that their resources could be handled more efficiently here on Earth. That — I mean thinking in terms of cost and human benefits — did away with war, too. It doesn't take long for attitudes to grow up. Then, too, during the overpopulated generations, the population was almost entirely neurotic. The scientists of that day simply made it possible, I imagine, for women to avoid having the children they didn't want anyway, so that no one had children except the healthy-minded women whose primary interest was in children. The neurotic death-wish in the others effectively reduced the population in only two or three generations. You might say that the neurotics committed race suicide. Is that your ship, or another of Destry's meteors?"

They scrambled down, stumbling in the darkness, as the incredible rocket-roar sounded, and, on a collapsing telescope of fire, the *Homeward* screamed down to its resting-place. Brian, standing between Destry and Ellie, wondered — but was

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too weary and too overexcited to ask — if Destry still regretted his failure to find a meteor.

V

Explanations, introductions and much rapid-fire conversation made the landing a babble of noise.

"Hey, we're here!"

"Who thought up that homing device?"

"Hey, I'm blind! No light on this planet? Couldn't we have landed to sunward?"

"What, in China?"

"Damned gravity, I can't walk!"

"Ellie!" (More imperatively than the other voices.) "Come here and get this devil-ridden cat of yours!"

Ellie dashed to Judy, who was carrying the squirming Einstein as she stumbled, clumsy-footed, down the ladder. "Here, take this animal!" she said crossly. "He's pulling my hair out by the roots!" She shoved the thick curls back over her shoulder, and fretted, "Hair's a worse nuisance in gravity than out of it!"

Ellie gently unwound her pet's suckers from Judy's ringlets, and the animal clung to her shoulder, squirming in crazy anticipation, struggling to get to the ground. She climbed the ladder painfully, wondering if she would ever adjust to the heavy gravity again, and, shoving into the lounge, ripped a strip of cloth from her skyhook to make a leash for the little animal. It was docile, but the prospect of running freely might tempt it to wildness.

As she came down again, she heard Frobisher's rich voice. "I offer the hospitality of our village and my home, for as long as you wish —"

Stumbling on the final rung, Ellie almost fell against Mellen and Paula, standing silently in each other's arms at its foot. Their faces glowed dimly in the reddish shimmer from the open door of the ship, and a pang of envy stabbed through Ellie. They had only one emotion about the landing. They didn't care what they found — they were here, and together. She turned swiftly, not wanting to violate their moment, but Tom looked up at her and smiled with a joyfulness that made his gaunt good-natured face almost handsome. Paula reached out and hugged Ellie, cat and all. "It's all over!" she whispered jubilantly. "We're here!" But her dark eyes were a little sad, too, as she added, "I only wish there was some way we could let — our mothers and fathers — know that we came safely."

"They would be sure of that," Ellie comforted softly.

Tom Mellen scowled. "What's Kearns sounding off about now? Shush, girls —"

Brian was protesting, "Look, we can't all go. Some of us ought to stay aboard the *Homeward*. I suggest that we sleep aboard, and visit the village in the morning —"

"You stay if you like," Caldwell said mutinously. "I've seen enough of the *Homeward* for a lifetime!"

Then open rebellion burst out.

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Little Judy set off the reaction by proclaiming violently, "If I ever go aboard the *Homeward* again, they'll have to carry me and tie me!" and Mellen shouted, "The trip's over and we're private citizens again, Kearns, so stop pulling your rank on us!" In the storm of voices, the Centaurian cat went wild and clawed its way from Ellie's shoulder, tumbling with a queer, staggering gait across the rough dark grass. Ellie screamed "Catch him, catch him!" and Paula made a grab for the creature, but missed, to trip and fall in the darkness. She lay there, laughing hysterically, watching the cat as it dived into the ring of lights. It stumbled and weaved on its spindly legs, thrusting pouch and tail weirdly to balance against the unfamiliar gravity; it sniffed the grass, with a musical caterwauling, then rolled over and over in the dark grass of the barrens, like a crazy asteroid tumbling in a wildly erratic orbit.

Brian didn't have a chance after that. The *Homeward's* crew, barely more than adolescents, and semi-hysterical anyway with release from strain and the euphoria of journey's end, lay on the grass and rolled and stretched like children, paying less than no attention to Brian's harangue. By the time Ellie had managed to recapture the staggering Einstein, and the laughter-drunk youngsters had calmed a little, Brian had only one desire: to restore some semblance of dignity to himself and his crew. Livid and all but speechless, he tersely requested Caldwell, the calmest of the group, to accept Frobisher's hospitality on behalf of all, and watched, leaning somberly against the ladder, as they trooped away, guided by Destry with a lantern, still laughing wildly at nothing, and hanging on to each other's hands in the darkness to keep from falling.

Hard Frobisher walked steadily toward him, and on an impulse Brian asked him, "Would you like to come aboard?"

Hard answered unexpectedly "Yes, I believe I'd be interested to see the inside of your ship," and followed Brian up the ladder, navigating the rungs with more ease than Brian himself, and into the lounge.

He looked curiously at the skyhooks and the complicated recreation devices, inspected the cabins without much comment, gave an interested hum in the Food Culture department. Finally Brian led him upward, into the enormous cabin where he himself had spent most of the voyage, handling the incredibly complex IS drives.

And here, before the tremendous machinery, Frobisher seemed at last impressed. He broke his silence with a wondering, "And you — you know all about this — this gimcrackery?"

Since the IS drives weighed upwards of a hundred tons, Brian laughed tolerantly at this understatement. "Yes, I'm a drive technician. I spent some time training."

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"It must take a lifetime to learn all this!"

Brian condescended, "No, only about twelve years."

"Twelve years!" Frobisher repeated. "Twelve years, and how many — four? — on the way here, wasted on a room full of machines!" And now Brian uncomfortably recognized the emotion in his voice. It was pity. "You poor boy," Frobisher said, and repeated "Poor boy! To waste sixteen years on these metal levers and things! No wonder you are —" He broke off, perhaps aware of the tightness of Brian's clenched jaw.

Brian said in a low and deadly voice, "Oh, don't stop there! No wonder I am — what?"

"Neurotic," Frobisher said quietly. "Of course you must give yourself some reason why you have not wasted your life." And sadly he shook his head. "Fortunately you are still young —"

"This ship," Brian said stiffly, "is the greatest accomplishment of the human race! If I live to be twice your age, I shall never —" Abruptly he rose and flicked a switch. The great dome cleared, and the immense magnifiers brought down the newly blossoming stars so that the man and boy stood under a vast, blazing galaxy of fire. "Damn it," Brian said huskily and his voice caught. "Man, we brought this little ship across nine light-years of nothing, nothing, *nothing!* We stepped on worlds where no human being had ever been before! You can't make out that that's nothing! It's the biggest thing humanity ever did — and I had the privilege to be part of it —" He was stammering, and, aware of it, he stopped.

Frobisher looked sad and embarrassed. "Poor lad, and what for? What did you, personally, get from it? What good did it do — not you alone — any single human being?"

Brian shouted suddenly, "You senile, half-witted old imbecile, I don't suppose you ever heard of abstract knowledge!"

"It isn't wholly unknown to me," Frobisher said coldly, but added, again with the same anxious friendliness, "Well, my boy, I suppose you believe as you've been taught — but can you show me one single human, now *or* in the past, who was benefited by the trip of the *Starward*, except in his personal vanity? I think, if you carefully examined the matter, you'd find that the building, launching and cost of the *Starward* defrauded quite a large number of people."

Brian said almost desperately, "Individuals don't matter. Knowledge — any knowledge — is for the good of the race as a whole — to lift humanity out of the mud of the sea bottom — toward the stars —"

"I can't breathe such thin air," Frobisher said lightly. "The mud is much more comfortable."

"And where would you be," Brian almost shouted, "if your remote ancestor had never crawled

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down a tree trunk because he was *comfortable* where he was?"

"Why," Frobisher returned, looking up at the stars that were brilliant in the dome, "I should be very happily scratching myself and swinging by my tail. Do you think the great apes have any ambition to be human? Unfortunately, I've come too far to be happy in a treetop or a cave. But it seems to me that it's important, for any individual human, to find the absolute minimum with which he can recover that state of effortless happiness he lost when he left the treetops. Do you know what this ship reminds me of?"

"No!" Brian snapped.

"A brontosaurus." Frobisher did not elaborate, and in surly silence Brian snapped a switch. The stars went out.

"Come on," he muttered, "let's get out of here."

Brian slept little that night. At daybreak he stole into the room where the six women of the crew were sleeping, and quietly woke them; one by one, wrapping themselves sleepily in blankets, they tiptoed into the men's bedroom, where the crew gathered close, listening to Brian's soft, savage whispers.

"Kids, we've got to do something — anything to get away from this madhouse!"

"Go easy, Brian," Mellen interrupted. "That's strong language, and I don't like it. These people aren't crazy, from what we saw and heard last night. They think we're a little off course, though."

Caldwell muttered, "They're probably right. They used to say that being too long in space drove men crazy."

Brian said bitterly, "You all seem insane!"

"I don't blame them," Ellie said unexpectedly. "What *is* the good of going shooting all over the galaxy? It was fine, back in the days when it made people happy, but these people are happy without it."

"Brian's right, of course," said Don Isaacs, a quiet boy who had never grown too friendly with any of the crew except Marcia, and who never had much to say. "But there's this. Let's be practical. We're here. We can't go back to Terra Two. And we can't start reforming them. So let's just make the best of it."

Mellen said shortly, "Good for you, Don. And one more thing: if Kearns keeps shooting off his big mouth, we're apt to land in the local equivalent of the lock-up, for disturbing the peace or something. The peace seems to be valued pretty highly around here."

"But what are we going to do?" Brian wanted to know. "We can't just *live* here, can we?"

"And why not?" Paula's voice was defiant, and Judy murmured, "There aren't as many gadgets and things as there are on Terra Two, but it's certainly a better place than the Ship!"

Mellen pulled Paula's small shad-

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owy form upright beside him. "I don't know why you came on the trip, Brian," he said. "But I came for one reason: because the Firsts trained me for it, and because if I'd begged off, somebody else would have had to. This isn't home, but it's as close to it as we're apt to find. I like it. Paula and I are going to settle down, and build a house or something."

Langdon added, "It's no secret that Judy and I — and Don and Marcia, —" he paused, "and Brian and Ellie too — have been waiting a lot longer than we wanted to wait. There are a couple of hundred people in this village. Nice people, too, I'll bet. I like that old fellow. He reminds me of great-grandpa Wade. Anyhow, that's almost as many as they have on Terra Two. And I'll bet they don't all spend their time knocking themselves out, synthesizing food and exploring and cataloguing the whole planet, either!"

"They certainly don't!" Ellie slid her arm through Brian's. "They are, now, where Terra Two is, without the struggle. They've conquered the planet. They can quit trying."

But Mellen murmured derisively, "Kearns is heartbroken! He wanted to find mechanical computers telling everybody when to spit, and robots doing all the housework!"

"Yes. . . ." Brian said thickly. "I guess I did. . . ."

He turned his back on them and slammed out.

Ellie thrust her way through the others and ran out into the new day. She plunged her way through the gradually thinning darkness after his retreating shadow, and found him, huddled at the foot of the pickup. She knelt close to him and put her warm hands over his cold ones.

"Brian — oh, my dearest —"

"Ellie, Ellie!" He flung his arms around her, hiding his head against her thin dress. The girl held him tight, without speaking. How young he was, she thought, how very young. He'd started training for this work before he could read. Twelve years, training for the biggest job in the world he knew. And now it all collapsed under him.

Brian said bitterly, "It's the waste, Ellie. Why — we might as well have stayed on Terra Two!"

"That's exactly what Frobisher said," Ellie told him gently. She glanced at the reddening clouds in the east, and such a wave of homesickness wrenched at her that she nearly sobbed.

"Ellie—why?" he insisted. "Why? What makes a culture just stop, go dead, stagnant? They were right on the borders of conquering the whole universe! *What made them stop?*" The agonized earnestness of the question made Ellie's voice very tender.

"Maybe they didn't stop, Brian. Maybe they just progressed in another direction. Space travel was right for the culture we knew — or maybe it wasn't. Remember what

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the Firsts told us, about the Russo-Venusian War, and the Mars Raids? These people—maybe they've achieved what all cultures were looking for, and never found."

"Utopia!" Brian sneered, and pushed her away.

"No," said Ellie very low, and put her arms about him again. "Arcadia."

"You're just the same, anyway. . . . Ellie, whatever happens, don't *you* leave me too—" he begged.

"I won't," she promised. "Never. Look, Brian, the sun's coming up. We should go back."

"Yeah, big day ahead," he said, and his mouth was too young to twist into such bitter lines. Then it relaxed, and he smiled and pulled her close to him.

"Not just yet . . ."

VI

Paula and Ellie stood on a knoll, near the abandoned *Homeward*, and watched the skeletal houses going up almost visibly beneath them. "The entire village has turned out!" Paula marveled. "Our house will be finished before night!"

"I'm glad there was land near the village for us," Ellie murmured. "Don't you feel as if you'd always lived here? And in only four months!"

The dark girl's face was sad. "Ellie, can't you do anything to keep Brian from—from sounding off at Tom? One day Tom will up and paste him one, and then you know what will happen to us!"

Ellie sighed. "And I'd hate to have either of us turned out of the village! It isn't all Brian's fault, Paula—" But then she paused, smiled sadly, and finished "I'm afraid he usually starts it, though. I'll do what I can, of course—"

"Brian is crazy!" Paula said emphatically. "Ellie—is it really true, that you and Brian will go on living in the *Homeward*?" She glanced distastefully at the black mass of the starship, and went on, "Why do you stand for it?"

"I'd live with Brian in a worn-out hydroponics tank, Paula. You would too, if it were Tom," Ellie said wearily. "And Brian's right, some one should keep the ship from being dismantled. Any of you had the same choice."

Paula murmured "I like our house better, especially now—" and she put her head close to Ellie and whispered. Ellie hugged her delightedly, then asked, "Are you feeling all right, Paula?"

The girl hesitated before answering. "I tell myself it's all my imagination," she said at last. "This planet belonged to our ancestors, our race; my body should adapt to it easily. But after being born and growing up on Terra Two where I weighed half what I do here, and then so long in free fall—I know it's hard for all of us, this gravity, but since the baby . . . My body is one damned enormous ache, night and day!"

"You poor thing—" Ellie put an

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arm around her friend. "And I think I have troubles because my eyes still hurt in this light!"

Judy, heavy-footed, puffed up the slope. She had wound her heavy hair into a coil on her neck, and would have been pretty, in her light synthetic ship's overall, had her eyes been less painfully screwed up against the brilliant sunlight. "Lazy things," she called gaily. "The men are hungry!"

"In a minute," Ellie answered, but did not move. She still found it more convenient to prepare food in the culture units of the *Homeward*, but disliked doing so now. However, on occasions such as today, when the villagers had turned out *en masse*, making a holiday of building the five new houses, it would make it easy to feed almost three hundred.

Langdon and Brian came up the hill, Hard Frobisher striding easily beside them. Langdon squinted at the woman and finally pretended to identify Judy. "You women are getting spoiled," he teased. "On Terra Two, you'd be working along with the men, Judy!"

Judy tossed her head. "I enjoy being spoiled," she said pertly, "and I'll have enough to do, learning what women do here!"

There was a derisive twist in Brian Kearns's smile. "I came off lucky," he commented sourly. "Ellie at least had training for this kind of life. What about you, Paula, are you sorry not to be playing nurse to your electronic calculator?"

Paula gave an eloquent shrug. "The women of the *Starward* chose to be scientists and were chosen *because* they were scientists! I learned navigation because my grandmother learned to fix a cyclotron before she had her babies on Terra Two! I'm shedding no tears."

"Well, suppose you two come and have a lesson in food culture," Ellie admonished, and the three women turned toward the ship. At the foot of the ladder, however, Ellie paused. "Paula, dear, you shouldn't climb these steps now. Go on back, we'll manage by ourselves," she offered gently, and Paula gratefully turned back to rejoin the men.

Meanwhile, Frobisher sat looking down at the rising houses. "Soon you will be part of our village," he commented. "I think you have all done well."

Brian nodded curtly in acknowledgment. He had not been prepared to find the village operating as a self-contained colony, very much like the one at Terra Two — the crew of the *Homeward* had expected to re-enter the complex financial structure of the world the *Starward* had left. But the system seemed simplicity itself. Every man owned as much land as he, alone, was able to work, and owned whatever else he made with his own hands. A man gave his work wherever it was needed, and in return was entitled to take what he needed; food from those who grew it, clothes from those who made them, and so forth. Whatever he

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needed beyond the necessities of life must be earned by industry, good management and private arrangements. Brian found the system easy and congenial, even enjoying the job he did — a carpenter in Norten had given him work, and Brian, whose training had familiarized him with tools and machinery, had found no trouble in adapting his specialized skills to carpentry and building. There was always building going on somewhere in the village, it seemed. Brian made a good living.

And yet, for all its simplicity, the system seemed remarkably inefficient. Brian said, looking down at the sprawled houses, "I would think it would be easier if you had some kind of central distribution system."

"It's been tried, often," the old man answered patiently. "Every few years, a group of villages will consolidate, to exchange services, or set up communication systems for private individuals, or distribute foods that can't be grown locally, or luxury goods of one kind or another. But that means devising a means of exchange, and keeping account of credits, and so forth. As a rule, the disadvantages are so much greater than the advantages that the consolidation breaks down again within a year or two."

"But there's no law against it?" Brian asked.

"Oh, no!" Frobisher sounded shocked. "What would be the sense of that? The purpose of the whole system is to leave each man as free as possible! Most places are just about like Norten — the maximum of comfort, and the minimum of trouble."

Brian murmured, "I should think, then, that you'd want all kinds of labor-saving devices. You cook with fire — isn't it easier to have food culture units, such as we have on the Ship?"

Frobisher gave the matter grave attention. "Well, a wood fire imparts a fine flavor to food," he remarked. "Most people prefer it. And a cook must take pride in what she cooks, or why cook at all? And, although food culture units may be easier, if one is lazy, for those who use them, no one wants to take the time to manufacture them. One man can build a fireplace in a day, with a neighbor to help, and cook with it for the rest of his life. For a food culture unit, a man would have to spend years in learning to build it, and dozens of skilled and unskilled workers take months to build it; and, in order to make them cheaply enough for one man to buy, millions of them must be made, which means hundreds and thousands of people crowded together, just making them, having no time to grow or cook their own food, or live their own lives. The cost is too high. It's more trouble than it's worth."

Langdon asked him suddenly, "Just what is the population now?"

Frobisher frowned. "You people certainly are full of questions! Who

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knows? Collectively, people are nothing but statistics, which are no good to anyone. People are individuals. A few years ago, a philosopher in Camey — that's where Destry was born — worked out what he called the critical factor in population: the point where a village becomes too large to be efficient as a self-contained unit, and starts to break down. It's a nice problem, if you're interested in abstract mathematics —which I'm not."

"But I am," Paula said behind them, lowering herself carefully to the grass beside the men. "It sounds interesting."

Frobisher looked at her with fatherly friendliness. "You and Tom can come with me, next time I go to Camey," he invited. "I'll introduce you to Tuck — but all I know is, if a village gets too large, it's more trouble than convenience, and about half the population will go away and start a new one, or move to a smaller place."

"It doesn't sound very workable," Brian said with sour skepticism.

"It works," Frobisher answered equably. "That's the final test of any theory — hullo, here's Tom. We're not lying down on the job, Tom — just waiting for the women to bring dinner."

Mellen thrust a penciled scrap of paper into Langdon's hands. "Is Judy around? I can't read this — her writing is half Russian and half Arabic!"

"She's in the ship with Kearns's wife," Frobisher answered, not noticing how Paula winced at the word which, on Terra Two, had acquired an ignominious connotation of servitude and sexual inferiority. The three men from the *Homeward* tried to ignore the vulgarity, and Langdon gave a self-conscious laugh. "I think I can translate for you."

"What have you got there?" Brian asked, interested against his will — Judy had been an electrician aboard the *Homeward*, responsible for all lighting circuits, and her work was capable and excellent. He squinted toward the paper. Langdon scowled. "I can't see a thing in this cussed sunlight! What's it supposed to be, Tom?"

"Wiring diagram. There are red bulbs in the *Homeward*, and Judy's going to put lighting in our house — and yours, too. Didn't she tell you?"

"I thought you'd both gone all-out on the primitive life," Brian muttered. Langdon snorted mockingly, and Mellen clenched his fists, then relaxed, with an easy grin.

"It's a free country," he said. Then suddenly he added, "Brian, it's none of my business, but are you and Ellie really going to stick to this damn foolishness? You'll be lonely up here. We could start on a house for you tomorrow."

"Somebody's got to keep the ship from being dismantled," Brian said stiffly. "And that reminds me, if Judy's going to do any wiring, she'd better use spare parts. No more trying to dismantle the drive units!"

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Langdon laughed softly, but Mellen's face darkened in annoyance. He said shortly, "You aren't captain any more. The *Homeward* isn't your personal property, Brian."

"I'm aware of that," Brian rasped. "Neither does it belong to the crew collectively. It's being held in trust. And since nobody else has any sense of responsibility, I'm acting as caretaker."

Frobisher looked up as if he were about to speak, but Paula forestalled him, asking gently, "What for? We've no fuel, we'll never take off again."

The nightmare settled down on Brian again. He was fighting — but fighting an intangible, unresisting opponent! If they had been malicious, it would have been easier. They weren't malicious, they were only stupid — unable to understand just why the *Homeward* must be safeguarded as their only link with civilized life. A year or two, he thought grimly, and they'll realize just what I'm doing, and why. Just now, this primitivism is new, novel. But they are basically intelligent, sooner or later they will get tired of this. They can't live from day to day, like the villagers — but how do the villagers live this way? Frobisher's a cultured man. Destry's a bright boy. How can they stand it, living like nice clean animals?

"What deep imponderable are you meditating?" Ellie mocked his serious expression with a gay grimace, and thrust a basket into his hands, loaded with hot food. "Langdon, Paula, Mr. Frobisher — all hands needed to carry food. Here, Destry, you take a basket too," she commanded, handing one to the boy. "Bring this down to the village, now. Dinner is ready. And hurry up before it all gets cold."

Brian absent-mindedly picked up a biscuit-like cake of protein and munched at it as they descended the hill, his mind still halfway circling the continual problem. Ellie offered her basket, in turn, to Destry and Frobisher, and the old man politely took a cake, but Destry shook his head. "Thanks, I don't care for synthetics, Ellie."

"Destry!" His grandfather said with unnecessary sharpness, while Ellie murmured, "I didn't know you'd ever tasted them."

Destry stumbled over a rock in the path and used a couple of unfamiliar expletives; by the time he had picked himself up, retrieved the luckily unhurt basket, and apologized unnecessarily for the words he had used — he might have saved the trouble, for Ellie had never heard them and did not know whether they were sacred or profane — Ellie had forgotten her question for another.

"Have you ever been out of Norten, Destry?"

"Once or twice. I went to Camey with my father, when he went to teach a man there how to weave a rug. He weaves beautiful rugs — much better ones than ours."

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"I see," Ellie murmured.

"He wanted me to come with him this time, but one place is pretty much like another, and I had my gardens to look after, so I stayed with grandpa. Besides, I had to —" Destry abruptly stopped. They were nearing the site of the new houses, and he called loudly "Dinner!" and watched the villagers swarm off their scaffolds and beams. He took one of the baskets and scooted away to hand it around.

The food from the *Homeward's* culture units was distributed, and the villagers ate it with polite thanks, but without much enthusiasm; only the children seemed to enjoy the elaborate synthetics, and even the *Homeward's* crew seemed to have lost their taste for it. Brian, sitting on a half-finished wooden step and munching absent-mindedly, abruptly made a face and flung the cake into the grass. Ellie cooked better, he decided, without the food machines. She liked the primitive cooking, and he had to admit she did it well. Still he felt disquieted. The food culture units synthesized their food out of raw carbon, water, and almost infinitesimal amounts of raw chemicals; the whole process of *growing* food seemed, to Brian, wasteful and inefficient. It took so much time. Of course, he reflected, it was pleasant, outdoor work, and the people who did it seemed to enjoy it. It wasn't so confining as standing over the machines, and you didn't grow so deathly bored, month after month, with nothing to do except push a lever now and then, and between the lever-pushings, scan films and play endlessly complicated mental games. Brian had been expert at a certain three-dimensional board game which had to be played with the aid of an electronic computation device; now he felt a curiously disloyal thought that his proficiency had been born of boredom. When you enjoyed your work, he thought, you didn't have to invent things to do in your spare time.

But I enjoyed my work, he told himself in confusion, I enjoyed working on the IS units.

Didn't I?

Furiously scattering the remaining synthetics on his disposable plate, he crumpled up the bit of plastic and flung it angrily away, grabbing up his tools — the new hammer, plane and level which the village smith had made in exchange for roofing a chicken-house and repairing his cellar steps — and shouted to Caldwell.

"Come on, let's get back at work, I want to get this floor laid by sundown!" He walked catlike across the empty beams, squatted where he had left off, and began sliding boards into place and nailing them with fierce, angrily precise blows.

## VII

He was still tersely angry and short-worded when, a few weeks later, he walked down through the

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village, a box in his hands. The houses were completed now, even to the steps, although still scantily furnished — Brian was still working, after each day's work, helping Caldwell build furniture.

He turned in at one still-raw, trampled muddy lawn, where brief spikes of summer grass were just beginning to peep through the wet earth, and knocked roughly.

Paula, a loose hand-woven smock wrapped about her body — she was beginning to grow clumsy and heavy now — opened the door, and her squinted, drawn face relaxed suddenly in a quick impulsive smile which made Brian feel ashamed and almost defensive.

"Brian — yes, Ellie's here, but —" She paused, hesitant, then invited shyly, "Won't you come in for a few minutes? We don't see much of you."

"I came down to see Tom — " Brian said uneasily, and followed Paula into the large reddish-lighted room. Before the fireplace he saw, to his intense dismay, that not only Ellie was there with Tom Mellen, but Langdon and Judy, Marcia and Don Isaacs, Destry, and — Hard Frobisher. Frobisher! It seemed that Hard Frobisher was continually underfoot, as if the crew of the *Homeward* needed his continual surveillance, assistance, advice! Brian frowned in annoyance; Frobisher acted like a self-appointed guardian to the newcomers. Yet it was impossible not to like the old fellow, even when he inquired genially, "And what have you in that big, interesting box, Mr. Kearns?"

"Just more of our top-heavy science," Brian said rudely, and, undoing the box, took from it several pairs of red-lensed glasses in bent-plastic frames. He handed one pair to Mellen and donned one himself. "Turn out these lights, and see if these help any in the sun, will you?"

Tom looked at the glasses, puzzled, for a moment, then hooked the frames behind his ears and switched out the red lights, stepping to the west door and looking into the setting sun. Then he turned, grinning.

"They work, all right! What did you do, Brian? Just red glass wouldn't work — remember, we tried it?"

Brian shrugged. "There's a polarized layer inside. I couldn't find selenium, so I used an oxide of gold for the red color. It's a thin quartz filter . . . . oh, never mind. I'd have had them before, but it took a damned long time to grind them."

Langdon took a pair from the box. "That's right," he said slowly. "I remember, Miguel Kearns made lenses for some of the old *Starward* instruments, when they broke, and when we were duplicating instruments for the trip. Did you help him?"

"Some," Brian returned. He met Frobisher's eyes, and said truculently, "So you have no use for science. Well, as you pointed out yourself, it's a free country, and my crew have been going around with sore eyes — and I don't like it!"

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Paula's strained face relaxed as she slipped the filter glasses over her eyes, and she smiled. "This is wonderful, Brian," she said, and Ellie's face glowed with pride. Langdon mocked in a friendly voice, "The old fellow's human after all!" and flung a companionable arm around Brian's shoulders. "When are you and Ellie going to come down off your lofty peak and live with the rest of the pack?"

Brian stiffened, but the tone of approbation warmed him, and he came back, half-unwilling, to the fireplace, and listened to Frobisher, who said, laughing faintly, "It isn't science itself we don't like. It's the use of science as an end in itself, rather than a means. I mentioned a brontosaurus. I assume you know what that is?"

"We had them, alive, on Terra Two — or something like them. They're big, but not dangerous — they're too dumb." Brian told him.

"Exactly," Frobisher said. "But they're not much good to themselves, are they?" He smiled; then his face sobered. "The brontosaurus, with his titanic body-mass, had outgrown the logical use of a development which had, originally, been good and useful. Science," he proceeded, "was developed to make life easier for man. The individual man. The light body-armor of the Barbarian soldier was developed to guard him against the simple weapons of his enemies. But it spurred on the development of more formidable weapons, and finally the armor had to be so cumbersome that the armored man must be lifted on his horse with a derrick. And if he fell down — well, there he was. It helped along the army, as a unit — but it certainly made life a mess, for the individual. And science gave so much time and thought to units — the Nation, the Race, Humanity-as-a-Whole — that it laid terrific burdens on humanity as individuals. To benefit the monster of Humanity-as-a-Whole, they even fought wars — which killed off humanity, individually, at a fearful rate. Eventually — well, the knight fell down inside his armor, and couldn't get up again. I think the collapse started even before the *Starward* left. The brontosaurus died along with his protective nuisances, but nature was a little kinder to men — individually. Humanity-as-a-Whole died out pretty thoroughly, even as a concept. The individuals who were left knew enough not to start the whole dreary process all over again. Science took its rightful place with the other arts and crafts — instead of using it to serve a hypothetical whole, we use each art, or science, to enrich the personal, private life of each individual." He gestured around the room. "The sawmill and pottery. Tom's red lighting in here. And — your red-lensed glasses, Brian. I think the time has come when I can tell you why —"

But Brian had already risen, and flung away from him.

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"I didn't come down here to be lectured!" he shouted at Frobisher, and strode to the door. "There are the glasses, Tom. You hand them out. Tell everybody not to break them; they take forever to grind."

The door slammed behind him.

Now that he had defied Frobisher, he felt a little better, but as the days came and went, he felt tormented by the uselessness of his life. He spent more and more time in vicious, expert hammering and sawing — in solitude, now — at furniture, finding a sort of satisfaction in substituting physical activity for insoluble mental problems; Ellie never dared to broach the subject of moving away from the *Homeward* again, until one night when Brian was sitting hunched over in the former lounge, listlessly watching Einstein clamber around the axis beams. The Centaurian cat's suckers were not strong enough to support his weight, in this gravity; he had developed a queer shambling gait on his hind feet, amusing to watch, but clumsy and painful, and Ellie picked up her pet and patted him as she passed through the lounge.

"Poor Einstein doesn't know what to make of this," she observed. "Gravity, in here where there ought to be no gravity at all. He'd be happier in a regular house."

"I suppose so," Brian said sourly. "I suppose you would, too. But look, Ellie; the crew would dismantle the ship inside a year or two."

"Well, why not let them?" Ellie asked, matter-of-factly.

Brian shrugged, helplessly. "I suppose, sooner or later — but still, some day Terra Two will go out into space again, too — *they* haven't reverted to savagery!"

Ellie only smiled. "It won't happen in our lifetime."

"You're worse than the others!" Brian shouted in sudden furious anger. She only murmured uncritically, "Come in and have dinner."

Brian morosely rose and followed her. He had to edge by a machine, suddenly stumbled over Einstein, and exploded violently, "It's too damn cramped in here!"

Ellie did not answer, and Brian finally said, "I suppose — it won't happen in our lifetime, no."

"What are you going to do then, pass this great secret on to your sons?" Ellie inquired, and Brian started to answer before apprehending the dry irony in her voice. It had taken him twelve years to learn even the basics of interstellar operation.

He applied himself grimly to his food; but his mood softened as he ate, and he finally looked up and said, "Frobisher can like it or not, but I'll make a scientist out of Destry yet. The kid's always underfoot. Ever since you taught me to fly the pickup — I took him up one day, and let him take the controls for a few minutes; they aren't very complicated." He spoke with a sort of satisfaction; it was a point of

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self-respect in his continual struggle to maintain himself in Frobisher's presence. "The boy's nuts on airplanes. He must have read a lot in old books."

Ellie asked suddenly, "I wonder what Destry's father is like?"

Brian scoffed, "He makes rugs!"

Ellie looked unconvinced. "Maybe he makes rugs the way Frobisher paints those birds he has all over the house. Look what I found in Frobisher's bookcase. Destry loaned it to me when I asked him." She handed him a book, nicely hand-bound in red cloth. Brian opened it curiously, skipping over the name — John D. Frobisher — penned neatly on the cover. He had seen few books in Norten village, and those were mostly blank-books filled with recipes, musical notations, or diaries — diary-keeping was a favorite pastime among young people here. But this was printed, and filled with elaborate, exquisitely reproduced diagrams which reminded Brian of Judy's scrawls when she was working out a wiring diagram. He tried to read a page or two, but, although the language was only loosely technical, Brian's education had been so rigidly specialized that the vocabulary was beyond him. He shut it up, and asked, "Did you show this to Judy?"

"Yes. It's a text, she says, on radio and radar, and not an elementary one either."

"Funny . . ." Brian mused.

"Here's something funnier," Ellie said. "Have you seen Caldwell lately? Or Marcia and Don Isaacs?"

"Come to think of it, I haven't. I never saw much of Don, though —"

"They went away, that night you and Frobisher had a fight. Marcia told me they were going so that Don could work in another village. That's what they always say — like Destry's father. People seem to come and go, here, all the time! Almost every day, somebody picks up a clean shirt and a pair of stockings, and walks off down the road. And nobody sees him again for three or four months — then he walks in again, as casually as I do when I go down to Paula's and back!"

"And the standard of living . . ." Brian mused "comfortable enough — but primitive —"

Ellie laughed. "Oh, Brian! We were happy enough on Terra Two, without quite so much. The ship is super-mechanized. We're spoiled — we've developed a lot of artificial wants —"

"Frobisher converting you, too?" he asked glumly.

Her laugh was gay. "Maybe."

Brian was silent, staring at the book. He felt trapped. It was an insidious poison, the temptation to relax, rest, dream and die in this — Ellie had called it Arcadia, but a fragment of poetry from an old book in the ship's library teased his brain; not Arcadia, he thought drearily, but the isle of the lotus eaters, who tasted the poison flower

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and forgot all that they had been before. . . .

The words of the ancient poet sang insidiously in his brain. He rose and fetched the book from behind a panel in the lounge, and sat with it on his knees, the words of defeat staring him in the face.

Hateful is the dark-blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea;
Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labor be?
Let us alone; Time driveth onward fast. . . .

How could a man who had mastered space live like this, in animal content, year after year? He wondered if among the lotus eaters there had been anyone who had refused the poison — and finally eaten it from starvation, or because he could not endure the loneliness of being the only sane man among a crew abandoned to their dreams?

Let us alone . . . what pleasure
can we have
To war with evil? Is there any
peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
Give us long rest or death, dark
death or dreamful ease. . . .

Brian scowled and let the book fall to the floor. There was nothing easy about life in Norten! In the last few days, weeks, months, he had worked harder than ever in his life. His hands, once sensitive and smooth, alert to the quiver of a lever, were hard and calloused and brown. And yet there was something satisfying about it. He no longer found himself inventing elaborate leisure-time pursuits, no longer felt impelled by continual anxiety about his crew, lest some minor infringement of a rule should lead to catastrophe. And Ellie — he had Ellie, and that, if nothing else, was something to hold him here.

And yet — after he had crossed space — his body thrived, but his brain was starving. Or was it, he asked himself. He'd gotten almost as much satisfaction — the guilty thought came — out of seeing his crew's eyes get well again, with the special glasses he'd made, as he had had in piloting the *Homeward* safely through a dangerous cloud of radioactive gas. Maybe — again the guilt — maybe more.

The glasses. But they couldn't go around wearing red goggles for the rest of their lives. There ought to be some way of gradually altering the filters, maybe at monthly intervals, so that they became gradually accustomed to the light. He pulled a stylus toward him, vainly rummaged for a loose sheet of paper, then irritably climbed into his old control room, search, and at last slid open the moving panel over the log book. His hands hesitated at the vandalism, then he shrugged and swore — the voyage was finished, the log book closed out! He ripped a blank sheet from the back, sat down then and there on the edge of

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the skyhook, and began to sketch out, roughly, a plan for glasses with changeable filters.

The yellow dawn was a glare in the sky when he finally came down; Ellie was sleeping in the cabin, her curly hair scattered over her face, and he quietly tiptoed past her and down the ladder. The air was cold and clear, and he stretched and yawned, suddenly realizing that he was very sleepy.

Against the brightening sky, a man's form was silhouetted as he gradually came over the knoll, and Tom Mellen called to him, "Is that you, Brian?" and came toward him with swinging strides. He had long ago discarded the shorts and sandals of the ship in favor of boots and long dyed breeches, and he wore one of his uniform shirts tucked into them. The ship's synthetics were not long-wearing or practical, although they were simply produced, but a few of the younger women in Norten had liked the thin pretty stuff, and exchanged lengths of it for the sturdier and more practical handmade variety.

As he came near, Brian asked him, "Where are you going so early?"

"I'm going to work awhile in another town," Tom told him casually. "I've a letter to a friend of Frobisher's. I came up to ask a favor. I don't suppose Ellie's up yet? Well, don't bother her, but —" He paused, then added, "I meant for Paula to come along with me. But she's not very well, and she doesn't want to be with strangers. She'd particularly miss Ellie. But I hate to have her alone —"

Brian said abruptly, "Tom, we're going to move down into the village. I've —" He glanced around at the *Homeward* and all his pent-up resentment suddenly spilled over and he shouted, "I'm tired of caretaking the damned old — brontosaurus! I'm through!"

Tom whistled. "What's gotten into you? I thought you were dedicated to maintaining a nice snug little island of culture." Then at Brian's expression, the sarcasm left his voice, and he said eagerly, "Brian, if you mean that, why don't you and Ellie move down with Paula while I'm gone? I'll be back before the baby comes, and we can get started on a house for you two."

Brian stood thinking it over for a minute, and finally nodded. "All right. I'm sure Ellie will want to; she worries about Paula."

Tom stood looking at the ground. "Well, I'll shove along and tell Paula to expect you, and then I'll get on my way." He paused, then said, low-voiced, "Brian — I thought, on the ship, you were just throwing your rank, about — well, about the girls. But now —" He stopped again, and said finally, embarrassed, "You know the baby was — started — before we landed?"

"I guessed that," Brian said coldly.

"I thought it was all right because

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we'd be landing within a month or two. But now — and the change in gravity, I'm afraid — if Paula and I had had the sense to wait — Judy's pregnant, you know, and she's not having any trouble at all, while Paula —" He stopped, and finally got out, "I guess I owe you an apology, Brian."

"You might better apologize to Paula," Brian said, but he had appreciated the spirit in which Tom spoke. So Tom finally realized that Brian had a good reason for what he'd done!

Tom added quietly, "I owe an apology for something else, too, Brian. It's my fault they've been leaving you out of things around here. I had the idea you were still trying to rehabilitate the natives."

"Don't bother apologizing," Brian said frigidly. So Tom had missed the point after all! "I'm not particularly interested in 'things around here,' and sooner or later I expect the natives will need rehabilitating, as you put it. When that day comes, I'll be here."

Mellen's mouth hardened. "I guess Frobisher's right about you!" he said tightly. "So long, then." He put out his hand, rather unwillingly, and Brian shook it, without enthusiasm. He watched as Tom descended the hill, wondering where he was going and why. Was it just part of the local irresponsibility? Tom was irresponsible anyhow — the way he'd behaved toward Paula was shameful. And who, here, was going to look after her? The local witch-doctor? He scowled, and went in to tell Ellie about their impending move.

VIII

Paula was almost pathetically grateful for Ellie's company, and even Einstein settled down near the new fireplace as cozily as any of the ordinary Norten cats with whom he had a continual feud. Brian located a site for the house he intended to build and, aided by Destry, began a rough workshop of fieldstone. In return for the boy's help, Brian took him, nightly, into the dome of the *Homeward* and taught him the names and positions of the fixed stars. The boy was filling a blank-book with astronomical data; Brian offered to present him with one of the astronomy texts duplicated in the ship, but Destry politely refused the gift. "I like to make my own. That way I'm sure of what's in it," he explained.

Brian himself was painstakingly perfecting his lens-grinding equipment. The workshop had gradually become his refuge, and, now that he knew he was working on something which was worth doing, he slowly began to come out of the closed shell he had originally thrown about himself, forbidding intimacy with the life of the village. He relaxed from the painstaking lens-grinding by beginning something he had not done since his early teens: glass-

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blowing. He made a set of fancy bottles for Ellie, and when Judy admired them, made one for her as well. Both Ellie and Judy had many friends in the village, and within a few weeks Brian found that so many men and women were asking him to make them that he could switch his full-time work from carpentry to glass-making. There was a potter in the village, who made extremely fine crockery, but at present the local glass-maker was — again the omnipresent phrase — "working in another village." Brian found the work congenial, and felt that he had approval.

However, privately, anxiety piled on anxiety. He actually saw very little of Paula, for there was still a certain stiffness between them; however, he felt disturbed at her obvious weakness. Ellie, too, was expecting a child by now, although as yet she had told no one but him, and Paula's condition filled him with panic for Ellie.

There had not been a medical man on the *Homeward:* none of them had ever been ill. Marcia had nominally been responsible for their health, but even Marcia wasn't here now. And judging from what little talk Brian had heard here in Norten, it was simply a matter of any woman's helping out when asked. Ellie had vigorously defended the system when Brian attacked it, protesting that having children was a natural function, and that the medical and surgical atmosphere with which the Terra Two colony surrounded it was enough to make any woman neurotic. Brian was unconvinced; that might be true when everything was normal, but Paula definitely needed care. He wondered how Ellie could be so unconcerned; Paula was her closest friend.

But even Brian was not prepared for the suddenness with which mere anxiety turned to disaster. At noon that day Paula was her usual self: pale and pathetically heavy of step, but gay and bright-eyed. In the evening she was quieter than usual, and went to bed early. And some time during the night Brian was roused by Ellie's hand on his shoulder and her scared voice: "Brian — *wake up!*"

Brian drew himself upright, instantly alert, seeing Ellie's tensely drawn face and hearing the near-hysteria in her voice. "It's Paula — I've never seen anything like it — she was all right this evening — oh, Brian, please come!"

Brian pulled a robe about his shoulders, thinking, what could have happened so suddenly? He heard the low, incessant moans even before he stepped into the inner room and stopped, aghast at Paula's face. It was altogether drained of color; even the lips were white and sunken, but a curious dark line marred their edges. She had always been excessively thin, but now her hands seemed suddenly shrunken into claws, and when Brian touched one, it was fire-hot. Brian cast his mind rapidly

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over what little he had been taught about the relationship of gravity and pregnancy — just enough to know that in free fall, a dangerous condition could develop suddenly. He wished he had known more, but they had taught him just enough that he was thoroughly convinced of the wisdom of enforcing strict celibacy in spaceship personnel. His brain, strictly specialized for one limited aspect of science, retained only a few fragments of knowledge. They fluttered and teased at the edge of his mind: imperfect placental junction without the cohesive effect of gravity, hormone malfunction under the added strain of pregnancy, extensive damage to internal tissues — all this was at free fall conditions. But what about Paula, who was adapted to the light gravity of Terra Two, whose child had actually been conceived in free fall, and who was being brutally punished by the dragging gravity of Earth? Something in the delicate balance of cohesions had evidently kicked loose. Brian looked down at the unconscious girl and spoke violently.

"*Damn Mellen for an insubordinate idiot!*"

"Where's Tom?" Paula whispered rackingly. "I want Tom!" The feverish bony fingers clutched at Brian's, and she begged "I want Tom!" Her eyes opened, but she was looking past Brian into space. Brian felt the old cold anger knotting inside him. He bent over and promised quietly, "I'll get him."

Ellie whispered, "But — I don't know where he's gone, Brian. Paula might be —"

Brian straightened savagely. "I'll find him if I have to take my fists to Frobisher! Thank God we still have the pickup! And I'll find out where Don and Marcia were sent; yes, *sent!* All along I've had the feeling —"

"Brian —" Ellie caught at his hand, but he pushed her away. "Frobisher's going to listen to *me* for once! He can damn science all he wants to. But if Paula dies on our hands because nobody on this dark-ages planet knows what to do for her, then by the living God I'm going to personally raise such hell in this god-forsaken little Utopia of theirs that Frobisher and his pals will snap out of their daydream and start living like human beings again!" Without another word he strode out of the room, dressed hastily and went out of the house, his long-repressed anger boiling up and stiffening his back as he hurried toward the village. He went up Frobisher's steps and across his porch at a single bound, thrust the door open without knocking, and stormed inside.

"Frobisher!" he bellowed unceremoniously.

In the darkness there was a surprised noise, then steps, a door flung open and a light shining in Brian's eyes — and Hard Frobisher, half-dressed, came swiftly into the main room. Another opening door showed the half-naked Destry, sur-

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prised and angry. Frobisher's face, dim in the firelight, was surprised, too, but there was no anger, and he asked calmly, "Is something wrong?"

And as always, his calm brought Brian's anger to the exploding point. "You're right there's something wrong," he raged, and advanced on Frobisher so violently that the old man retreated a step or two. "I've got a girl on my hands who looks as if she were going to die," Brian roared, "And I want to know where on this devil-ridden planet you packed Tom off to, and where Marcia's gone! And then I want to know if there's a decent medical man anywhere in this damned backward dark-ages Utopia of yours!"

Frobisher's face swiftly lost its calm.

"Tom's wife?"

"And there's no need to talk smut!" Brian shouted, "Paula!"

"Paula Sandoval, then, if you like it better. What's the trouble?"

"I doubt if you'd understand," Brian snapped, but Frobisher said steadily, "I suppose it's the gravity sickness. Tom mentioned it before he left. It's easy to get hold of him. Destry —" He turned to the boy in the doorway. "Quick, go down and get the Center on the wire. Tell them to fly Mellen back here, inside an hour if they can. And — where's your father, Destry? This sounds like something for him."

Destry had disappeared inside his room while his grandfather was talking; almost instantly he came out again, stuffing his shirt into trousers. "He was in the Marilla Center last week, too," Destry said quickly, "but he's in Slayton now. And there's no regular transit plane there. Hey, Mr. Kearns —" He turned quickly to Brian. "You can fly the *Homeward's* plane now, can't you? Or shall we get Langdon? They'll fly Tom in from the Marilla Center, but we'll have to fly over and pick up my father."

"What the — what the *hell* —!" Brian started, but Destry was already hurrying down a flight of stairs. Hard Frobisher put a compulsive hand on Brian's shoulder and shoved him after the boy. Brian stumbled on the steps and blinked in the raw light of an electric arc-bulb. On a rough wood workbench, with Destry's notebooks and a few ordinary boy-type oddments, the stupefied Brian recognized what was unmistakably a radio transmitter. And not a simple one. Destry was already adjusting earphones and making a careful calibration of an instrument which looked handmade but incredibly delicate. He moved a key and said in a hurried voice, "Marilla Center, please, second-class priority, personal. Hello — Betty? You've got a man in the Center working on radio? Mellen? That's the man. This is Destry Frobisher talking from Norten. Fly him over here — as fast as you can make it. His wife's ill — yes, I know, but it's a special case. Thanks —" A long

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pause. "Thanks again, but we'll manage. Look, Betty, I have to get Slayton. Clear the stations, will you?" Another pause, and he said, "My father. Why? Oh — thanks, Betty, thanks a lot. Tell them we'll bring a plane over there for him." He closed the key and ripped off the headphone, standing up, and Brian exploded again.

"Just what's going on?" he demanded. "*What kind of a bluff have you people been putting up on us?*"

"No bluff," Frobisher said calmly. "I've told you, all along, that we use science, in its proper place. I've tried to tell you, two or three times, but you always shouted at me and shut me up before I could explain. Tom Mellen has been working in one of the Centers for a month. Didn't you wonder why he wasn't worried about leaving Paula, in her state of health? He's known that if any serious complication developed, he'd be sent for right away." He turned and started toward the stairs. "Don't you realize this is the first time you've ever shown the slightest *personal* concern for anyone or anything? Before this, you've been concerned with scientific accomplishments for their own sake. Now look, you can stand here staring like a brainless fool, or you can come with me to the Center to fetch my son — Destry's father — who is one of the most skillful medical men in this section." As Brian stood stone-still, unable to move before the onslaught of ideas, Frobisher urgently took his arm. "Snap out of it!" he commanded harshly. "I *can* fly a plane, but I would hate to have to manage that jet of yours! And I'll have to come with you, because you don't know the way! Destry, you stay close to the radio, just in case," he added.

Brian, too dazed to speak, stumbled with him across the dark fields toward the pickup, but by the time they reached it, his reactions were in operable condition; he climbed in at the controls, advised Frobisher to fasten a safety strap, put the pickup in the air, and listened intelligently to Frobisher's instructions for reaching the place he called Slayton Center. Then he turned his head.

"Look," he said grimly, "I'm a little stunned. Just what has been going on?"

Frobisher looked equally puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"All this —"

"Oh, this!" Frobisher dismissed it with a shrug. "You had fire extinguishers on your spaceship, I remember. Did you keep them out on your dinner tables, or did you leave them out of sight until they were needed in a hurry?"

"I mean — you let me go on thinking that people here didn't know much about science —"

"Listen, Kearns," Frobisher said abruptly, "you've been jumping to conclusions all along. Now don't jump to another one, that we've been bluffing, and concealing our civilization from you. We live the way we like to live."

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"But radio — planes — you have all those things, and yet —"

Frobisher said, with barely concealed disgust, "You have the Barbarian viewpoint, I see. Radio, for instance. We use it for emergency needs. The Barbarians used to listen to keep from doing things — I know, they even had radio with pictures, and used to sit and listen and look at other people doing things instead of doing them themselves. Of course, they had rather primitive lives —"

"Primitive!" Brian interrupted. "You have airplanes, and yet people walk —"

Frobisher said irritably, "Why not? Where is there to go in such a hurry — as long as we have fast transport for those few times when it is really necessary?"

"But even when the *Starward* left, each man had his own private 'copter —"

"Private baby carriage!" Frobisher snorted. "When I go anywhere, I go on my feet like a man! Stupid, primitive Barbarians, living huddled in cities like big mechanical caves, never seeing the world they lived in, hidden away behind glass and steel and seeing their world on television screens and through airplane windows! And to make all those things they had to live huddled in their caves and do dirty smelly jobs with metal nuts and bolts, and never see what they were doing, never have any pride or skill — they lived like dirty animals! And what for? Mass men for mass production — to produce things they didn't need, to have money to buy other things they didn't need! Top-heavy brontosaurs! Who wants to live that way, or do that kind of work? There are a few craftsmen who build airplanes, or design them, because that's what they would rather do, and they'd be unhappy if they couldn't. They're artisans. And we can always use a *few* planes. But there aren't many, so we keep the planes for necessary work. And most people like doing simpler things, things with personal satisfaction. We don't force them to mass-produce airplanes simply because it's possible!" He checked his vehemence with an almost apologetic cough. "I didn't mean to get angry — that's the Slayton Center down there. You can land inside that rectangle of lights."

Brian set the pickup down easily — it seemed to be rolling over a velvety carpet — and they got down and walked, in silence, across the darkly luxuriant grass, toward a low frame building of dark wood. Inside, by the warm glow of a fireplace, a man sat at a large table, lighted by an expertly rigged system of miniature spotlights, looking down at what appeared to be a large relief map. A headphone was on his ears; he glanced up as they came through the door, but motioned them into silence, listening intently, and after a moment groped blindly into a box fixed on the side of the desk and

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came out with a large black pin which he stabbed accurately into the relief map. "Tornado reported between Camey and Marilla. All right, then, ring off and send Robinson up to put a bomb in the center of it before it hits the farms out that way." He replaced the headphone, and inquired, courteously, "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

"Hello, Halleck," Hard Frobisher said, and, advancing to the desk, shook hands with the man, "This is Brian Kearns — came in from space."

"Oh, are they still coming in, down your way? The last one we had here was in my grandfather's time," the man Halleck observed casually. "No, come to think of it, down there in Marilla they have a man called Mellen, been working the weather station. Do you know him, Mr. Kearns? I'm glad to meet you."

Brian murmured something noncommittal, and looked around, dazed. Halleck added, "I suppose you came to pick up Dr. Frobisher? He's on his way over. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks." Frobisher sank down in a comfortable armchair, motioned Brian into another. The man at the desk hung up his headset and came to stand by Frobisher's chair. "Good to see you, Hard. When do you come up here again?"

"Not for a month or so. You'll be off by then?"

"I should say so! I've a couple of good cows calving, and I want to be home."

"Those blacks?" Frobisher asked. "Drive a few through Norten some day, and we'll see if we can't make a deal. I could use a good bull, and there are some new families with children, could use a milk cow."

Brian didn't try to follow the conversation after that; it seemed to be mostly about cows and the luck a mutual friend was having in breeding chickens which laid black-shelled eggs. Frobisher finally took pity on his blank face. "He's never been at a Center, before, Halleck," he told the stranger, who grinned. "Pretty dull, aren't they, Mr. Kearns? I'm always glad to come up here when it's time, but I'm always glad to get back to the farm."

Brian said, "I'm a little stunned at all this —" and added, "I'd understood your — your civilization wasn't scientific —"

"It isn't," Frobisher said sternly. "It definitely is not. We use science; it doesn't use us. Science, Mr. Kearns, is no longer the plaything of powerful warmongers, nor is it enslaved to an artificial standard of living, keyed to an unhealthy, neurotic population who want to be continually amused, rocked in a cradle of overstimulation! It is not a plaything for pressure groups, so-called educators, fanatics, adolescents, egocentric exhibitionists, or lazy women! Men are no longer under pressure to buy the products of commercialized science to create employment and keep the cities running. Anyone who's interested, and

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who has talents and skills which go beyond day-to-day living, which is more than half of the population, spends a few months every year doing the things which need doing, not just in science. Halleck here knows more about weather conditions than anyone else in the South Plains. About four months out of the year, he sits over there, or works out in a weather plane, fighting tornados before they get started, working on reforestation, handling drought conditions. The rest of the year, he lives like anybody else. Everybody lives an easy, balanced life. Man's a small animal, and has to have a small horizon. There's a definite limit to his horizon, which is why a village breaks down and starts having internal trouble when it gets too big. But groups of people, as a whole, have to have some idea of the world over the horizon, if they're going to avoid the development of false ideas, superstitions and fears of strangers. So every man leads a secure, balanced life in the small horizon of his village, where he is responsible for himself, and responsible to every person he knows — and also, if he is capable, he lives a larger life *beyond* the village, working for others — but still and always for individuals, not for ideals." Brian opened his mouth to speak, but Frobisher quietly forestalled him. "And before he can work in the Centers, he has to prove himself as a responsible individual in the villages. There's a place waiting for you, Brian. How would you like to teach a course in the mechanics of interstellar space?"

"*What?*" Brian spluttered. "You mean — space travel?"

Frobisher laughed heartily. He glanced at his watch and said inconsequentially, "My son will probably be here in a few minutes — but still, I've time to explain —"

He turned to Brian again. "For two or three months a year," he reminded him. "There is always a use for knowledge, whether we can use it immediately or not. Our present way of life won't endure forever. At best it's an interim device, a probationary period, a sort of resting stage while man returns to sanity before he starts climbing again. Some day, man will probably take to space again, even the stars, but this time, we hope he'll do it with a sense of perspective, counting the cost and weighing it against individual advantages." He paused, and added quietly, "I think he will."

After a long silence, he added, "I'm a historian. Back in the First Renaissance, man was starting to outgrow his atavistic notion about survival of the strong and powerful instead of the best. Then, unluckily for Europe, and also unluckily for the Redmen, the so-called New World was discovered. It's always easier to escape across a frontier, and drive your misfits out instead of learning to live with your problems. When that frontier was finally conquered, man had a second chance

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to learn to live with himself and with what he'd done. Instead, after wars and all kinds of trouble, he escaped again, this time to the planets. But he couldn't escape from himself — and eventually that frontier was filled up to the saturation point, too. So he escaped again, this time by launching the *Starward* — but that time he went just one step too far. And then the crash came. Every man had the choice: die in his armor, or take it off." He grinned. "I thought for a while, Brian, that you were a brontosaur."

Brian mopped his forehead. "I feel pretty extinct," he murmured.

"Well, you can try teaching interstellar mechanics for awhile. The rest of the time —"

"Say —" Brian interrupted anxiously. "I don't have to start right away, do I? I'm fixing up a new set of lenses for the crew —"

Frobisher laughed, heartily and kindly, and put a hand on his shoulder. "Take your own time, my boy. The stars won't be bridged again for centuries. It's a lot more important to get your crew's eyes in good condition again." He rose abruptly. "Good — here is John, and I suppose by now, Mellen's on his way to Paula."

Brian quickly got to his feet as a tall dark-haired man in a white jacket came into the room. Even in the dim light the resemblance to Frobisher was obvious; he looked like an older, maturer Destry. Frobisher introduced the men, and Dr. John Frobisher gave Brian's hand a quick, hard shake.

"Glad to meet you, Kearns. Tom Mellen spoke about you, last time I was in Marilla. Shall we be on our way?" As they turned outward, and crossed the lighted airfield, he and his father spoke in low tones, and for once Brian had nothing to say. Even his thoughts were not working as he put the pickup in the air. The reversal had been too fast. Then, abruptly, a memory hit him and he turned his head around to ask sharply, "Listen here, if you can receive radio signals, *how is it that no one answered the* Homeward's *call from space!*"

Frobisher looked a trifle embarrassed. He said gently, at last, "We use a special, tight-beam transmission. Your signals are the old wide-band ones, and they came in as bursts of static."

For some reason Brian felt incredibly relieved, and his relief exploded in laughter.

"I *told* Tom our radio devices would be obsolete" . . . he choked.

"Yes," Frobisher said quietly. "Obsolete, only in a way you hadn't planned for. The whole crew of the *Homeward* was obsolete — and you've been on probation all along. But you've come out of that now, I think. Wait a bit — don't go on to Norten just yet. Turn north — just a mile or two. There's something I want you to see."

Brian protested, "Paula —"

John Frobisher leaned forward.

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"Mellen's wife —" and this time Brian did not bridle at the vulgarism, "— will be all right, Kearns. We don't get the gravity sickness very often, now, but any danger in it was knocked out even before the spacers quit running. The girl's probably uncomfortable, and it looks terrible, but it isn't dangerous. We'll have her fixed up within an hour."

And somehow Brian's anxiety slid away. The words didn't mean much to him, but his training had taught him one thing, at least; he recognized competence when he met it, and it was in every inflection of John Frobisher's voice. Acquiescently he swung the ship to the northeast. The rising sun broke in a wave of brightness over the horizon, revealing the far-away line of ruined buildings that looked down drearily over a too-flat strip of dismal, barren land where nothing grew, a straight level plain of gray concrete. For miles it seemed to stretch away; Brian, flying low, could see the grass that pushed its way upward through the crumbling concrete, the dreary gap-windowed buildings softened a little by ivy. And then he saw them: eight tall regular shapes, straight and still gleaming a little. . . .

"There are only two laws in our culture," Frobisher said quietly. "One is that no man shall enslave another. And the second —" he paused, looking straight at Brian, "— is that no man shall enslave himself. Which is why we have never destroyed these ships. This was the old spaceport, Brian. Does it look very majestic? Would you care to land?"

Brian looked, thinking: this was what he had expected to see first. And yet, somehow, this was what seemed greatest to him: that man, having created this monster, should have the common sense to abandon its dreary domination — and the courage to leave it there. Men destroy only what they fear.

"Come on," Brian said steadily. "Quit riding me. Let's get back home — and I do mean home. There's a sick girl waiting for you, doctor. And even if it isn't dangerous, they're going to be worrying until you tell them it isn't." Abruptly he gunned the jets and turned the ship southeast toward Norten Village, into the rising sun. He was not aware that he had passed the final test. He was thinking about Paula, and about Ellie, waiting and worrying. He knew in the back of his mind that he'd come back here some day, look around a little, maybe even mourn a little; you couldn't put away the biggest part of your life. But he wouldn't come right away. He had work to do.

The pickup of the *Homeward* flew away, into the morning. Yet behind them the mighty symbols remained, cold and masterful, a promise and a threat: eight great starships, covered from nose to tail with green-growing moss and red rust.

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# *Blood*

*by* FREDRIC BROWN

IN THEIR TIME MACHINE, VRON AND Dreena, last two survivors of the race of vampires, fled into the future to escape annihilation. They held hands and consoled one another in their terror and their hunger.

In the twenty-second century mankind had found them out, had discovered that the legend of vampires living secretly among humans was not a legend at all, but fact. There had been a pogrom that had found and killed every vampire but these two, who had already been working on a time machine and who had finished in time to escape in it. Into the future, far enough into the future that the very word *vampire* would be forgotten so they could again live unsuspected — and from their loins regenerate their race.

"I'm hungry, Vron. Awfully hungry."

"I too, Dreena dear. We'll stop again soon."

They had stopped four times already and had narrowly escaped dying each time. They had *not* been forgotten. The last stop, half a million years back, had shown them a world gone to the dogs — quite literally: human beings were extinct and dogs had become civilized and man-like. Still they had been recognized for what they were. They'd managed to feed once, on the blood of a tender young bitch, but then they'd been hounded back to their time machine and into flight again.

"Thanks for stopping," Dreena said. She sighed.

"Don't thank me," said Vron grimly. "This is the end of the line. We're out of fuel and we'll find none here — by now all radioactives will have turned to lead. We live here . . . or else."

They went out to scout. "Look," said Dreena excitedly, pointing to something walking toward them. "A new creature! The dogs are gone and something else has taken over. And surely we're forgotten."

The approaching creature was telepathic. "I have heard your thoughts," said a voice inside their brains. "You wonder whether we know 'vampires,' whatever they are. We do not."

Dreena clutched Vron's arm in ecstasy. "Freedom!" she murmured hungrily. "And *food!*"

"You also wonder," said the voice, "about my origin and evolution. All life today is vegetable. I —" He bowed low to them. "I, a member of the dominant race, was once what you called a turnip."



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*In which one of our three most attractive authors (a perfectly safe observation, so long as no one asks me to name the other two, or to award the Golden Apple among them) presents the deft and charming tale of a marriage, a hangover, a tomcat and an Alien Observer.*

# *Birds Can't Count*

*by* MILDRED CLINGERMAN

EVERYBODY HAS HIS OWN WAY OF weathering a hangover. Maggie's husband's way was to ignore the whole matter, stoutly denying, if pressed, that he suffered at all. Maggie never denied Mark the right to this brave pretense, but she had long ago noted that on such days the family car needed a great deal of tinkering with, which necessitated Mark's lying down under it or in it for several hours. Maggie refused any such face-saving measures. Right after breakfast on the day after the party she took to her bed, fortified with massive doses of $B_1$, a dull book and, for quiet companionship, Gomez, the cat.

The window cooler hummed invitingly in the darkened bedroom; the curtains belled out in the breeze, and Maggie, shedding everything but her slip, climbed gratefully into bed. The book was called *Hunting Our Feathered Friends With a Camera*, and Maggie, who knew nothing of photography or birds, began to read it in the hope of being bored into sudden sleep.

Sleep had been very elusive lately. It was silly of her to become so disturbed over shadows . . . or, more often, the lack of shadows. But how to explain her uneasiness to Mark, or to anybody? Once, last night at the party, she'd come very close to asking her friends for help or, maybe, just sympathy — the talk had turned to ghosts and hauntings — but luckily she'd called back the words before they'd formed. The whole thing was too nebulous to talk about. From the first, Mark had labeled it paranoiac, laughing at her wide-eyed account of *something* that looked at her in the bathroom, trundled after her to the bedroom, then watched her in the kitchen while she pared potatoes. When Mark had asked where for pete's sake was there room in that small kitchen for a secret watcher, Maggie had shut up. Not for worlds would she leave herself open to



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Mark's delighted shouts (she could just hear him) by answering that question.

"If I'd said: 'on top of the refrigerator,' " Maggie thought drowsily, "I'd never have heard the last of it."

. . . *The hunting urge is deeply ingrained in man. It is no longer necessary to hunt for food; take a camera in your hands and stalk your prey. The prime hunter, anyway, from the days of the caveman, has been the artist, tracking down and recording beauty. . . . Allow your children and yourself the thrill of the chase; satisfy this primitive urge with a safe weapon, the camera. Patience . . . do not harm the nests . . . natural setting . . . build yourself a blind . . . patience . . . catch them feeding . . . mating . . . battling . . . patience . . . quick exposure . . . patience . . .*

Maggie slept.

Minutes later she woke to find Gomez, the cat, sitting on her stomach. She and Gomez, good friends, regarded each other gravely. Gomez, aware that he had her full attention, tossed his head skittishly.

"You woke me," Maggie accused.

"*Mmm-ow-rannkk?*" He was giving her the three-syllable, get-up-and-feed-me treatment. Maggie was supposed to find this coaxing irresistible.

"Blast and damn," Maggie said gently, not moving. Gomez trod heavily towards her chin.

"All *right*," Maggie muttered. "But stop flouncing. Whoever heard of a flouncing tomcat —"

Both Maggie and Gomez froze, staring at something close to the ceiling.

"Do you see it, too?" Maggie rolled her eyes at Gomez, which so terrified him he immediately began evasive action — bounding off the bed, stumbling over her shoes, caroming off her desk, falling into the lid of her portable typewriter, his favorite sleeping spot. Gomez cowered deep in the lid, one scalloped ear doing radar duty for whatever danger hovered.

"That's my brave, contained cat." Maggie crooned through her teeth. She raised herself up on her elbows to stare at one corner of the ceiling; her eyes moved slowly with the slow movement there. But was it movement? Strictly speaking, it was not. Only some subtle shifting of the light in the room, she thought. That was all. The ceiling was blank and bare. Gradually the tumult of her heart subsided. Maggie caught sight of her face in the dressing table mirror. She was interestingly pale.

"It's all done with mirrors, Gomez, and who's afraid of a mirror? Neither you nor I . . . a car went by, or a cloud. Take one cloud, a mirror, and a hangover; divide by . . . Wait a minute. I just thought of something."

Gomez waited, relaxing somewhat in his tight-fitting box. Maggie sat cross-legged in the middle of the

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double bed silently pursuing an elusive memory.

White face . . . tents . . . carnival . . . yes, the spider lady! It was one of the first dates I had with Mark, and how much I impressed him, because I saw through the illusion at once. There in the tent, behind a roped-off section, sat a huge, hairy spider with the head of a woman. The head turned and talked and laughed with the crowd, but glared at me when I began to point out to Mark the arrangement of the mirrors. It was all simple enough and fairly obvious, but not to Mark. Not to most people. Later, over coffee and doughnuts, I explained rather proudly to him that magic shows, pickpocket shows, that kind of thing, were always dull for me, because I could see so clearly what was really happening — that the way to look, to watch, was not straight on, but in a funny kind of oblique way, head tilted. Mark squeezed my hand then and made some remark about a crazy female who goes through life with her head on one side, seeing too deeply into things . . . .

It is nice to remember young love, Maggie thought, but I'm losing the track of that thought. Oh, yes . . . and then during the war there was the General at Mark's basic training camp — he definitely lacked my peculiar ability — who came to check on the trainees' camouflaged foxholes. Mark wrote me about it. The old boy cursed them all for inept idiots who couldn't decently camouflage a flea, and then, right in front of the whole company and still cursing the obviousness of their efforts, stepped straight into one of the concealed holes and broke his leg. So . . . ?

Maggie lay back on her bed, her usual abstracted look considerably deepened. Her mind wheeled around to the party last night. Something said or done then nagged at her now. What was it? It had been a good party. Nobody mad or sad or very bad. The summer bachelor had flitted about like an overweight hummingbird stealing sips of kisses . . . and almost drowned in the blonde, bless her. A mercurial young man had explained to Maggie what a bitch his first wife was, while staring rather gloomily at his second. . . . The talk had ranged from ghosts to sex, from religion to sex, from flying saucers to sex, and everybody had come out strongly on the side of the angels and sex. The rocket engineer believed passionately in the flying saucers, but — *that was it!*

He'd said: "Maggie, it's silly and sweet of you to hope for a *deus ex machina*, come to save civilization, but have you considered we may mean nothing to them emotionally? Haven't you ever watched ants struggling with a load too big for them? How much did you care? Even if, like God, you marked the fall of every sparrow, you might simply be conducting a survey or

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expressing colossal boredom, like the people who delight in measuring things. You know what I mean —if so and so were laid end to end . . . " And right there the talk had turned back to sex.

"So," Maggie said aloud, "I'm being watched. Cataloged. Maybe photographed. Either that, or I'm nuts, loony, strictly for the birds." She grabbed the dull book and began to read again, not quite sure what she was looking for. She studied the photographs in the book, and for the first time it struck her how self-consciously posed some of the birds looked. "Hams," Maggie dismissed them. "Camera hogs." She glanced at herself in the mirror, hesitated, then got up and combed her hair and lipsticked her mouth. In the mirror she could see Gomez peering cautiously from the typewriter lid towards a spot over the window cooler. The shadowy coolness of the room lightened for a moment, and Gomez' eyes registered the change, but Maggie didn't mind. She was posing sultrily and liking the effect. Maggie had decided to cooperate for the time being and give the unseen watcher an eyeful.

*Mind you,* she was thinking furiously, *if this is camouflage, it's out of my class . . . maybe out of this world. Then how am I to prove it? It might be easier just to go quietly nuts. . . . But I've got too much to do this week to go crazy. Next week, perhaps. What am I saying! Fie on this character, whoever it may be. With my tilted, eagle eye I will ferret him out!*

Cheered, she began to do sitting-up exercises. Next, she stood on her head. Unfortunately she couldn't see anything, since her only garment fell down around her ears.

Mark opened her bedroom door and peered in.

"Good God, Maggie!" he said. "What's up?"

Maggie's head emerged from the folds of the slip, and she lay full length on the rug. "Just a game," she said. "Wanta play?"

"Please, Maggie," he said plaintively. "Not just now. I've got to go polish the car."

"Idiot," Maggie said. "I'm studying photography . . . I think. Go away, you're apt to ruin the exposure."

"I am not," Mark said doggedly. "It's a lovely exposure, it's just that I have to —"

"—polish the car!" Maggie threatened him with a shoe. Mark sighed and withdrew, closing the door gently behind him.

Maggie got up and dressed in shirt and shorts and tried the headstand again. Gomez watched her with wide, startled eyes. Next she bent down and peered back between her legs while turning slowly to survey all four sides of the room. Nothing. Wearily she sat a moment on the rug, rubbing her aching brow. Her eyes felt sandy, and she

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rubbed them, too. She glanced at Gomez and saw that he looked like two cats, one barely offsetting the other, like a color overlay on a magazine page that wasn't quite right. She rubbed her eyes harder to dispel the illusion, and just then she saw the watcher.

She and the watcher stared at each other across the intervening space and across the little black box the watcher held. Even now his image was not clear to Maggie. One moment he was there, the next he was a something-nothing, then he was gone.

Maggie rubbed furiously at her eyes again and brought him back to her vision. This time she was able to hold him there, though the image danced and swam and her eyes watered a little with the effort. It was just like any illusion, she thought; once you know the trick of looking at it, you feel stupid not to have seen it at once.

"Peek-a-boo," she said. "I see you. But stop wiggling."

The watcher's expression did not change. He continued to gaze at her raptly. But all the rest of him changed. He reminded Maggie of mirages she'd seen, linking and flattening mountain tops. Was he human? A moment ago, he might have been. But now he was a great whirl of gray petals with the black box and the staring eyes remaining still and cool in the center. The eyes were large, dark and unblinking. The gray petals now drooped like melted wax and flowed into stiffening horizontal lines like a stylized Christmas tree, and the liquid eyes became twin stars decorating its apex, with the black box dangling below like a gift tied to a branch. The tree dissolved and turned into a vase-shape, with delicate etchings of light on the gray that reminded Maggie of fine lace.

Maggie got up purposefully and walked towards the fluidly shifting image. The watcher shrank into a small square shape that was like a window open onto cold, slanting lines of rain. Maggie reached out a hand and touched the solid plaster wall.

"Nuts," Maggie said. "I know you're there. Come out, come out, and we'll all take tea."

The watcher's gaze now turned toward her feet, and his form lengthened and narrowed so drastically that he reminded Maggie of nothing so much as a barber pole with gray and white stripes. The barber pole grew an appendage that pointed downward. It seemed to be pointing at Gomez, who had seated himself just where Maggie might most conveniently step on him, and was yawning as unconcernedly as if the watcher did not exist, or as if he were quite used to him. The watcher grew another appendage, raised the black box, and just then a tiny shaft of light touched Gomez on the nose.

Maggie watched carefully, but Gomez did not seem to be hurt.

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He began to wash his face. "Is it a camera, then?" Maggie asked. No answer. She looked wildly around the room, grabbed up the framed photograph of her mother-in-law and showed it to the watcher. The staring eyes looked dubious. But by dint of using her eyebrows and all her facial muscles Maggie finally made her question clear to him. One appendage disappeared into the black box and drew out a tiny replica of Gomez yawning. It was a perfect little three-dimensional figurine, and Maggie coveted it with all her heart. She reached for it, but the wavering barber pole drew itself up stiffly, the eyes admired the figurine a few moments, glared haughtily at Maggie, and the figurine disappeared. Maggie's face expressed her disappointment.

"What about me?" Maggie pointed to herself, pantomimed the way he held the box, then touched her own nose lightly. The eyes at the top of the barber pole gazed at her blandly. The barber pole shuddered. Then the watcher pantomimed that Maggie should pick up Gomez and hold him. Maggie did, and again the little shaft of light hit Gomez on the nose.

"Hey!" Maggie said. "Did you get me, too? Let me see." No response from the watcher. "Oh well," Maggie said, "maybe that one wasn't so good. How about this pose?" She smiled and pirouetted gracefully for the watcher, but the watcher only looked bored. There's nothing so disconcerting, Maggie thought, as a bored barber pole. She subsided into deep thought. Come to think of it, Gomez had been with her each time she'd sensed the presence of the thing.

"Blast and damn," she said. "I will not play a supporting role for any cat, even Gomez." She made fierce go-away motions to the image-maker. She shoved Gomez outside the bedroom. She created a host of nasty faces and tried them on for the watcher. She made shooing motions as if he were a chicken. Finally, in a burst of inspiration she printed the address of the Animal Shelter on a card and drew pictures of cats all around it. She held it up for the barber pole to read. The eyes looked puzzled, but willing. The little black box was being folded into itself until now it was no larger than an ice cube. The barber pole swelled into a caricature of a woman, a woman with enormous brandy-snifter-size breasts and huge flopping buttocks. The eyes were now set in a round, doughy, simpering face that somehow (horribly, incomprehensibly) reminded Maggie of her own. The watcher then, gazing straight at Maggie, mimicked all the nasty faces she'd made, stood on his (her?) head, peered between his legs, smiled and pirouetted, pretended to leer at himself in a mirror, and then, very deliberately, indicated with one spiraling finger atop his head that Maggie was nuts. He gave her one

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look of pure male amusement and disappeared.

"Come back and fight," Maggie said. "I dare you to say that again." She rubbed her eyes without much hope, and she was right. The watcher was gone.

Rather forlornly, Maggie took to her bed again. "It's the worst hangover I've ever had," Maggie moaned. "So maybe I wasn't looking my best, but it's a bitter blow . . ."

The worst of it was, she could never tell anybody, even Mark. What woman could ever admit she had less charm than a beat-up old tomcat? "But I've found out one thing," Maggie thought. "I know now what dogs and cats stare at when people can't see anything there. . . ." But she almost wept when she remembered her old daydream — of watchers lovingly studying and guiding mankind, or at least holding themselves ready to step in and help when the going got too rough. Suppose, though, the watchers considered mankind no more than servants to the other animals? Feeding and bathing them, providing warm houses and soft, safe beds. . . .

It was a sickening thought. Maggie harbored it for two minutes, and then resolutely dismissed it from mind.

"Fiddlesticks! He wasn't that stupid. In fact, he was a damn smart-aleck. So he liked Gomez. So what? Maybe he's a woman-hater."

She settled back against her pillow and opened the bird book:

*Remember, birds can't count. When you build your blind, let two people enter it. Let one person go away, and the birds will return without fear, thinking they are safe. In this way, you will get good, natural pictures of our friends eating, fighting, and mating. . . .*

Mark opened the bedroom door and walked in. "Maggie?"

"Hmm?" Maggie went on reading.

"I couldn't polish the car. . . ." Mark grinned at her.

"Why not?" Maggie dropped the dull book with alacrity. She knew that grin.

"I kept thinking about that new game you were playing. . . . Some type of photography, did you say? Then I know the perfect name for it."

"What?"

"It's called see-the-birdie, and it isn't a new game at all — it's just part of an old one."

Maggie stretched luxuriously and made an apparently irrelevant remark: "So long, hangover."

**WIN A NEW ENGLISH FORD!**

*For details, see the February issue of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE — on sale, January 11th.*

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*Last month Martin Gardner told us of the early life of Lyman Frank Baum, who spent the first 43 years of his life as a restless jack of all trades — actor, playwright, printer, reporter, editor, columnist, trade-journal publisher, bazaar-proprietor, salesman of crockery and of crude oil, always moving on to something new until, at the turn of the century, he found himself as the first great creator of purely American fairytales.* THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ *(1900) was one of many, and Oz was only one out of a number of wondrous countries invented by Baum's imagination, such as Mo, Yew, Ix, and Merryland. But fine though these other countries were, there was something special about Oz, as proved by the triumph of Montgomery and Stone as the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow in the musical comedy* THE WIZARD OF OZ *(1902). Baum ventured on a sequel,* THE MARVELOUS LAND OF OZ *(1904); but even after that he continued to work on stories unrelated to Oz . . . until public demand proved overwhelmingly that Oz was unique in its appeal. Here is the story of how those first two Oz books grew into the gay, lovable, dizzy and wonderful series which is one of our most joyous heritages.*

# *The Royal Historian of Oz*

*by* MARTIN GARDNER

*(second of two parts)*

THE SECOND OZ BOOK DID NOT CONcern Dorothy — nor in fact did any person from outside of Oz take part in the story. But readers remembered fondly the little Kansas farm girl, and yielding to their entreaties Baum reintroduced her as the central character of his third volume in the series, *Ozma of Oz*, in 1907.

Dorothy's companion on her second adventure is a proud yellow hen called Billina. Other "Ozzy" characters, also introduced for the first time include Tik-Tok, a mechanical copper man; the Hungry Tiger, who longs to eat little babies but whose conscience never permits him to do so (a neat illustration of the Freudian conflict between the *Id* and *Superego!*); and the Nome King, a delightful mixture of evil and the comic, who appears in many later Oz books as the sworn enemy of both young Dorothy and Ozma.



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Tik-Tok is one of the earliest robots in American fantasy. As his directions for winding read, he "thinks, speaks, acts, and does everything but live." Parts of his mechanism are always running down at crucial moments. Once in a later book he lapses into double-talk when his thought mechanism, but not his speech, ceases to operate.

The remaining Oz books, all of them excellent, contain scores of fantastic personages, meat and meatless. There is the Woozy, a blue, square-shaped animal of wood whose eyes dart fire whenever anyone says "Krizzle-Kroo" (the Woozy does not understand what this means, and it is this which makes him so furious). There is the Patchwork Girl, a cotton-stuffed figure whose meeting with the Scarecrow is one of the highlights of the book in which she first appears. Quox, a friendly dragon sent by Tititi-Hoochoo to conquer the Nome King, is the model for Ollie in the *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie* TV show. Burr Tillstrom, the show's creator and pupeteer, has long been an Oz fan.

One does not easily forget Johnny Doit, with the long gray whiskers and copper tool chest, who can build anything in just a few seconds; The Lonesome Duck, a miserly misanthrope who lives alone in a palace of diamonds and hates everybody; the Braided Man who sells boxes of assorted ruffles for ladies' skirts and flutters for flags; the Fuddles, a race of 3-D jigsaw people who "scatter" when disturbed, thereby giving visitors the fun of putting them together again.

The two cats in Oz deserve special mention. Both behave exactly as you would expect. Eureka, Dorothy's meat cat, permits herself to undergo a long court trial to determine if she has eaten one of the Wizard's piglets before she informs the court where the little pig can be found. Bungles, a glass cat with a cold ruby heart, is so reluctant to show her emotions that once when she leaves to obtain help for friends in distress, she moves very slowly to give the impression she is indifferent to their fate. As soon as she is out of sight, however, she runs like a streak of crystal.

At the close of *The Emerald City of Oz* Baum tried to drop the series altogether. Glinda, the most powerful sorceress in Oz, cast a spell over the country which made it impossible for the Royal Historian to obtain further information. You can imagine, of course, the deluge of letters from heartbroken readers. Baum quickly reestablished communication with Oz and the series continued. He did manage to do two more superb fantasies that did not concern Oz: *Sea Fairies* and *Sky Island*, about the adventures of a girl named Trot and her companion, a peg-legged sailor called Cap'n Bill — both of whom were later added to the roster of Oz's meat people.

Certainly one reason for the immense popularity of the Oz books is

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the fact that they are told with such careful attention to detail that a strong sense of reality is created. It is no wonder that thousands of children have believed for a time that Oz really does exist. The intricate geography of Oz is well worked out, and a map of the country was actually issued as a folded insert in one of the books. As every Oz reader knows, the country is rectangular and divided into four regions, each with a characteristic color. The first edition of *The Road to Oz* was printed on tinted paper which changed color each time the scene shifted to another region! In the center of Oz is the Emerald City where Princess Ozma rules in a palace of glittering gems. Surrounding Oz on all sides is the Deadly Desert. Anyone touching the desert turns instantly into a grain of sand.

Many social and economic details about Oz are known. Its population is about half a million. The Emerald City, at the time when it was almost conquered by the Nome King, had 9,654 buildings and 57,318 inhabitants. There is no sickness and disease in Oz. No one ages and death occurs only rarely as the result of serious accident.* All animals talk in Oz, and they are treated with as much respect as humans. In many ways Oz resembles the anarchist Utopia of William Morris' *News from Nowhere*. There is virtually no police force because all Ozites are happy, unselfish, and contented. They work half the time, play half the time. There is no money, no rich, and no poor. "Each person," the Royal Historian tells us, "was given freely by his neighbors whatever he required for his use, which is as much as any one may reasonably desire."

Fortunately, not all parts of Oz are this orderly — especially the wild, unsettled areas of the north and south where many queer and unruly races flourish. Otherwise there would be no dangers and consequently no adventures.

Dangers yes, but horrors no. It is a rare occasion when Baum describes a scene that might frighten a sensitive child. Only a morbid adult will object to a wicked witch melting away, or Jack Pumpkinhead carving a new head for himself to replace a former one that has spoiled. Baum's intention, stated in the preface of *The Wizard*, to leave out the "heartaches and nightmares" was amply fulfilled. You have only to read the original Grimm and Andersen, Pinnochio, or many another children's classic to realize how skillfully Baum managed, in contrast to these works, to retain the excitement and avoid the violence and

* This is a point debated among enthusiasts of Oz, since the Royal Historian's reports are not too clear or consistent. The key-passage seems to be in *The Magic of Oz:* "It is possible for beasts — or even people — to be destroyed [as the Wicked Witches of the East and West were by Dorothy in *The Wizard*], but the task is so difficult that it is seldom attempted. . . . it is doubtful whether those who come to Oz from the outside world, as Dorothy . . . did, will live forever and cannot be injured. Even Ozma is not sure about this. . . ."

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tears. Perrault's original story of Red Riding Hood, still the version told to French children, ends with the wolf eating both the little girl and her grandmother. A good case can even be made for the view that this sort of violence is a healthy purging of a child's sadistic emotions as well as a valuable early introduction to the reality of evil. "Children love a lot of nightmare and at least a little heartache in their books," writes Thurber, and he for one is glad that Baum did not succeed completely in keeping these elements out of his work. It is true that Baum occasionally forgot his promise, especially in *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* where an atmosphere of violence and gloom hangs over a good part of the tale. But on the whole his books are remarkably free of shocking scenes, and the spirit of Oz is a happy, sunny one.

As might be expected, Baum often contradicted himself. Like the Baker Street Irregulars who go to great lengths to find plausible explanations for Watson's memory lapses, a group of Oz fans can spend many pleasant hours suggesting ways for harmonizing contradictions in the work of the Royal Historian. The Land of Ev, for example, lies just across the Deadly Desert. But in what direction? You can find a basis for placing it to the north, south, east, or west of Oz. The early history of Oz, before the Wizard arrived in his balloon, is riddled with difficulties. There is reason to believe that grass takes on the color of each region in Oz, and equally good reason to think it doesn't. Exactly what happens when a Nome touches an egg? Does he wither away or turn into an egg? Why do the Shaggy Man and Polychrome, the Rainbow's daughter, act like total strangers when they meet for the second time? These are only a fraction of the tantalizing problems that face an Oz student.

An equally fascinating pastime is to speculate on how Baum arrived at the names of various characters and countries. In many cases the basis is obvious. For example, Princess Langwidere is a haughty woman with a "languid air." General Jinjur is a girl with lots of "ginger." But what about Woot the Wanderer, protagonist of *The Tin Woodman of Oz*? Did Baum take the initials of the book's title and switch the "T" from front to back? The word Oz itself has been the subject of much speculation. One theory is that Baum looked up at a filing cabinet and saw the words "From O to Z." Another is that it came from Boz, nickname of Charles Dickens who was one of Baum's favorite authors. And someone has pointed out that Job lived in the land of Uz. More likely, it was simply one of the many words that Baum invented and used because he liked the sound.

The Baums moved to Pasadena in 1909 where Baum constructed an enormous bird cage in the garden and stocked it with 40 song birds.

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His love of nature is reflected in all his writings, and one has the feeling that when the Tin Woodman expresses horror at the thought of injuring a butterfly, he is expressing the sentiments of the author. Baum never cared for hunting and fishing. In early life his favorite recreations seem to have been swimming and archery, though in California, as he approached his sixties, he turned more to golf and gardening. When the Baums moved to Hollywood in 1910, a large garden surrounded Ozcot (Baum's name for the home he built there). Baum won over twenty cups in flower competitions and even became known as "The Chrysanthemum King of Southern California."

At the time Ozcot was built, Hollywood was still a small suburban town. The infant movie industry was then centered in New York. But as Jack Snow, the author of a recently published *Who's Who in Oz* has observed, Baum was unable to escape from fairyland. The movie industry grew up around him. After his death Mrs. Baum sold a portion of their lot for an enormous sum. Ozcot is still standing, just one block from Hollywood Boulevard, and the Historian's widow continued to live there until her death in 1953, at the age of 91.

As one would have expected, Baum was fascinated by the artistic potential of the film. In 1908, while still living in Chicago, he invested heavily in the production of a series of short movies depicting stories from his books. He called them "Radio Plays." They were presented in Chicago and later in New York with Baum standing by the screen to narrate the tales. This venture was a financial failure and in 1911 Baum filed a bankruptcy petition in California. He listed his debts as $12,600 and his assets as two suits of clothes and a typewriter.

In 1913 Baum made his third and last attempt to repeat the stage success of *The Wizard*. His musical *The Tik-Tok Man of Oz* had short runs in Los Angeles and Chicago but was not well received. (Baum's enthusiasm for the stage, however, was never-ending. In later years he used to appear as an actor — and, according to reports, a very good one — at the Uplifters' Ranch in company with such professionals as Will Rogers.)

The following year, 1914, he turned his attention once more to motion pictures, forming the Oz Film Company to produce screen versions of his tales. In a press interview he explained that because of the many color plates his books had to sell at a price which kept them from millions of youngsters. Through the movies he hoped to make his stories available to every American boy and girl for the cost of admission to the theater — five cents. This project also proved unsuccessful, though the company did produce one dismal film in 1914 — *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*. The picture is still

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sold in faded home movie versions under the title of *The Raggedy Girl.*

*The Wizard of Oz* was filmed as a one-reeler by Selig Pictures in 1910. Another silent version was issued in 1925 by Chadwick Pictures, starring the comedian Larry Semon as the Scarecrow. And of course everyone over twenty remembers M-G-M's lavish technicolor production in 1939 with Judy Garland in the role of a singing Dorothy. Ray Bolger played the capering straw man, Jack Haley the tin man, and Bert Lahr the Cowardly Lion. Other roles included Billie Burke as Glinda, Frank Morgan as the Wizard, and the Singer Midgets as the Munchkins. The picture featured some bright tunes (*Over the Rainbow* and *We're Off to See the Wizard*) but to my tastes was marred by sentimentality and an inexcusable revelation at the end that the whole thing was a dream.*

Baum's generous heart, unlike the fine velvet heart of the Tin Woodman, was not replaceable. As he passed the age of 60 it began to falter. It is interesting to note that the last Oz book he wrote, *Glinda of Oz*, is almost completely devoid of humor. I have often fancied that the sunken island on which Dorothy was trapped beneath a lake during the latter half of the story was an unconscious expression of Baum's own sinking emotions. The island was finally raised when Dorothy thought of the proper magic words. There were no magic words for Baum's failing heart, and on May 6, 1919, at his home in Hollywood, it finally gave way.

*Glinda of Oz* was published after Baum's death. He left scattered notes for another Oz book which the publishers turned over to Ruth Plumly Thompson, a twenty-year-old Philadelphia girl who had written a number of stories for children. *The Royal Book of Oz*, which she edited and to a major extent wrote, was the last of the series to carry Baum's name. Since then Miss Thompson has written eighteen additional Oz books, many of them charmingly told.

The late John Rea Neill, who so ably illustrated all of Baum's Oz books except the first one, also tried his hand at three Oz books. Not much can be said for Neill as a writer, but as the Royal Painter of Oz his pictures are as indissolubly linked with the Oz books as Tenniel's illustrations are linked with Alice. Whatever one may think of his pictures as works of art, there is no denying that he caught the flavor of Baum's text, and his pictures have exactly the sort of color and realism that Oz books require. Denslow's illustrations for *The Wizard* possess a quaint charm, but they are not pictures of Oz.

* Many enthusiasts of Oz, including Ray Bradbury, Jack Snow, and this editor, disagree sharply with Mr. Gardner. To my own taste, the film was the finest American fantasy picture I have seen — as imaginative, charming, humorous and inventive as Baum's own tales. — A. B.

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A great deal can be said for Miss Thompson's books and also for the most recent Oz book, written by Rachel Cosgrove; but in the opinion of many Oz fans the mantle of Royal Historian should fall on the shoulders of Jack Snow. His two Oz books are remarkable in capturing the mood and style of Baum's own work. They are both excellent, and when Snow tells us he has established TV communication with the Emerald City one is inclined to believe him. I have already mentioned his *Who's Who in Oz*, which contains biographies of all of Baum's astonishing characters.* Jack Snow (it's his real name) has been shadowed all his life by Oz. At the moment he works in New York for the Associated Hospital Service, or AHS as it is called, and he is not in the least surprised at how this sounds when you pronounce it.

* Published by Reilly & Lee ($2.75), this biographical index may, of course, be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. — A. B.

Ray Bradbury, one of the best of modern fantasy writers, has spoken many times of the influence of Oz on his career. His story, "The Exiles," pictures a future world in which the psychiatrists have succeeded at last in destroying all books of fantasy. The narrative closes with the collapse of the Emerald City as the last Oz book burns.

But I do not think the Emerald City will collapse for a long long time. A child's love of fantasy is too healthy a love. "Perhaps some of those big, grown-up people will poke fun at us," Baum wrote in the introduction to one of his early books, "— at you for reading these nonsense tales . . . and at me for writing them. Never mind. Many of the big folk are still children — even as you and I. We can not measure a child by a standard of size or age. The big folk who are children will be our comrades; the others we need not consider at all, for they are self-exiled from our domain."

## A CHRONOLOGICAL CHECKLIST OF WORKS OF FANTASY BY L. FRANK BAUM

1897 MOTHER GOOSE IN PROSE. Chicago: Way and Williams. Illustrated by Maxfield Parrish. Twenty-two stories, each based on a Mother Goose rhyme. Dorothy, a little farm girl, appears in the last story.

1900 THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ. Chicago: George M. Hill. Illustrated by William Wallace Denslow. A cyclone carries Dorothy and her dog, Toto, from Kansas to Oz where she meets with many strange adventures before she is magically transported home. Although copyrighted in 1899, the book did not appear until May the following year.

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A NEW WONDERLAND. New York: R. H. Russell. Illustrated by Frank Verbeck. Fourteen amusing tales about the beautiful valley of Mo. The Cast-iron Man is Baum's first use of a mechanical robot. The present edition bears the title, THE MAGICAL MONARCH OF MO.

1901 DOT AND TOT OF MERRYLAND. Chicago: George M. Hill. Illustrated by Denslow. The adventures of a small boy and girl in Merryland, where a wax doll, aided by her "thinking machine," rules over the seven valleys.

AMERICAN FAIRY TALES. Chicago: George M. Hill. Illustrated by George Kerr and others. Fifteen fairy tales, one of which describes the temporary halting of time and motion in an American city.

THE MASTER KEY. Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill. Illustrated by Fanny Cory. Baum's only science fiction novel. Rob (the author's son, Robert) accidentally arranges some wires in a curious network that summons the Demon of Electricity. The Demon provides the boy with six electrical wonders — concentrated food tablets, a ray gun, a device for traveling through the air, a garment that protects him from injury, a device picturing events as they take place anywhere in the world (i.e., television), and spectacles enabling him to see anyone's true character. After many mishaps, Rob sends the Demon away with his gifts, convinced that the world is not yet wise enough to cope with them.

1902 THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS. Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill. Illustrated by Mary Cowles Clark. A pagan biography of Santa Claus from birth to old age when the gods confer upon him the Mantle of Immortality. An elaborate Dunsany-like mythology is involved.

1903 THE ENCHANTED ISLAND OF YEW. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. Illustrated by Cory. A fairy, weary of her life as an immortal, becomes a knight in armor for one year.

1904 THE MARVELOUS LAND OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. This and all subsequent Oz books by Baum are illustrated by John R. Neill. The Scarecrow, ruling as King of Oz, is overthrown by an army of girls, in turn overthrown by Glinda. The boy Tip is released from his enchanted form to become Princess Ozma, rightful heir to the throne.

1905 QUEEN ZIXI OF IX. New York: Century. Illustrated by Frederick Richardson. A magic cloak provides the fulfilment of one wish for each of its wearers. The story was first serialized in *St. Nicholas* in 1904 and 1905.

THE WOGGLE-BUG BOOK. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Ike Morgan. A giant-size picture book about the Woggle-Bug's misfortunes in an American city.

1906 JOHN DOUGH AND THE CHERUB. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Neill. The mad adventures of John Dough, a large gingerbread man, and his companion, Chick the Cherub. Chick is the world's first incubator baby. His (or her) sex is never revealed. A Chicago newspaper offered a prize for the best reason for thinking Chick either a boy or girl, and contest blanks were inserted in early editions of the book.

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BANDIT JIM CROW, MR. WOODCHUCK, PRAIRIE-DOG TOWN, PRINCE MUD-TURTLE, SUGAR-LOAF MOUNTAIN, and TWINKLE'S ENCHANTMENT — six small books by Laura Bancroft (pseud.). Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Maginel Wright Enright. The six tales were issued as a single volume in 1911 under the title TWINKLE AND CHUBBINS.

POLICEMAN BLUEJAY, by Laura Bancroft (pseud.). Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Enright. Two small children acquire the bodies of birds and magically enter a nature fairyland. Re-issued in 1917 as BABES IN BIRDLAND, with Baum's name on the title page.

OZMA OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Dorothy and a yellow hen are caught in a storm at sea, washed overboard, and carried to the shore of Ev. With the aid of Tik-Tok and a group of Ozites led by Ozma, they force the Nome King to release from captivity the royal family of Ev. By means of the Magic Belt, taken from the Nome King, Ozma teleports Dorothy home.

1908 DOROTHY AND THE WIZARD IN OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. An earthquake drops Dorothy and her cousin Zeb into the earth's interior where gravity is weak and suns of different colors provide illumination. They meet the Wizard who has been caught in the same quake. After many frightening adventures they reach a cul-de-sac, but are extricated by Ozma who sees their plight in her Magic Picture and teleports them to Oz. Dorothy and Zeb are later teleported home, but the Wizard remains in Oz. The book was written during the year of the San Francisco quake.

1909 THE ROAD TO OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Dorothy, the Shaggy Man (a vagabond from Colorado), Button-Bright (a small boy from Philadelphia), and Polychrome (the Rainbow's daughter) enjoy many picaresque adventures before they arrive at the Emerald City in time for Ozma's birthday party — a wonderful feast attended by Santa Claus, John Dough, Queen Zixi of Ix, the doll-Queen of Merryland, and almost every other character so far created by Baum in or out of the Oz-series. The Magic Belt sends Dorothy home.

1910 THE EMERALD CITY OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. The Nome King gathers a large army of evil immortals for the purpose of conquering Oz. They dig an underground tunnel to the Emerald City, emerge near the Fountain of Oblivion. Thirsty and tired, they drink from the fountain and immediately forget why they came. Meanwhile, Ozma has teleported Dorothy and her aging uncle and aunt to Oz, to become permanent residents.

1911 THE SEA FAIRIES. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Neill. Trot, a California girl, and her peg-legged sailor companion, Cap'n Bill, are taken on an exciting undersea tour by three mermaids.

1912 SKY ISLAND. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Neill. A magic umbrella carries Trot, Cap'n Bill, and Button-Bright to an island in the sky. Trot becomes ruler of the Pinks. In a war with the Blues she defeats the evil Boolooroo and reigns as queen of the island until they find the umbrella and are able to return to earth.

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1913 THE PATCHWORK GIRL OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. The Munchkin boy Ojo, the Patchwork Girl, and others go in search of five curious items needed by a magician to restore Ojo's uncle to life. The uncle had been accidentally turned to marble by the magician.

JACK PUMPKINHEAD AND THE SAWHORSE, LITTLE DOROTHY AND TOTO, OZMA AND THE LITTLE WIZARD, THE COWARDLY LION AND THE HUNGRY TIGER, THE SCARECROW AND THE TIN WOODMAN, and TIK-TOK AND THE NOME KING — six separate booklets, each a complete short story about Oz. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Illustrated by Neill. Published as a single volume, LITTLE WIZARD STORIES OF OZ, in 1914.

1914 TIK-TOK OF OZ. Reilly and Britton. Betsy Bobbin, from Oklahoma, the Shaggy Man, Tik-Tok, and others succeed in rescuing Shaggy's brother from a long imprisonment by the Nome King. A fall through a tube that extends through the center of the earth is involved in one episode.

1915 THE SCARECROW OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Trot, Cap'n Bill, Button Bright, and the Ork (a featherless bird with a propeller tail) are aided by the Scarecrow in conquering the wicked King of Jinxland.

1916 RINKITINK IN OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Fat and jolly King Rinkitink and his young friend Prince Inga, with the help of Dorothy and the Wizard, liberate Inga's parents from the Nome King.

1917 THE LOST PRINCESS OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. Ozma is kidnapped by Ugu, a shoemaker turned evil sorcerer. A search party headed by the Wizard breaks into Ugu's castle and transforms him into a dove. The unusual spot where Ugu concealed Ozma is finally disclosed by the Pink Bear, a wind-up automaton capable of answering any question.

1918 THE TIN WOODMAN OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Britton. The Tin Woodman and the Tin Soldier visit their former sweetheart, Nimmie Amee, and find her happily married to Chopfyte, a composite man assembled from parts of their original "meat" bodies. The story includes a remarkable conversation between the Tin Woodman and his former head.

1919 THE MAGIC OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Lee. The Nome King tries to recruit an army of wild beasts for a second attempt to conquer Oz. Meanwhile two parties set out from the Emerald City to secure unusual birthday presents for Ozma. The three groups intertwine, but all ends well. Of special interest is the magic word PYRZQXGL. Correctly pronounced, it enables one to assume any desired form.

1920 GLINDA OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Lee. Ozma and Dorothy try to prevent a war between the Skeezers and the Flatheads (who carry their brains in a can). Glinda and the Wizard come to their rescue after they are trapped in a glass-domed city that submerges beneath the water of a lake.

1921 THE ROYAL BOOK OF OZ. Chicago: Reilly and Lee. In an effort to learn something about his ancestry the Scarecrow slides down his family tree (the beanpole on which he first came to life) and finds himself in the Silver Islands. Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, and a knight, Sir Hocus of Pokes, save the Scarecrow from a nefarious plot.

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1953 JAGLON AND THE TIGER FAIRIES. Chicago: Reilly and Lee. Illustrated by Dale Ulrey, edited and expanded by Jack Snow. First in a projected series of book editions of nine "animal fairy tales" (as Baum called them) which first appeared in *The Delineator* in 1905.

## REFERENCES ABOUT BAUM

UTOPIA AMERICANA, by Edward Wagenknecht, 1929. This rare booklet, published by the University of Washington Bookstore, Seattle, is the first and only critical study of Baum's work to date.

"The Wizard of Chittenango," an article by James Thurber, *New Republic*, December 12, 1934.

*Cyclopedia of American Biography*, New Edition, Vol. 10, p. 168.
*National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Vol. 18, p. 331.
*Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 2, p. 59.
*Encyclopedia of American Biography*, New Series, Vol. 6, p. 378.

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*Leigh Brackett is the acknowledged mistress of the flamboyant interplanetary adventure. No one can rival her in telling such a story as, say,* Purple Priestess of the Mad Moon *so skilfully and even artistically that readers normally allergic to such extravaganzas are astonished to find themselves enjoying it. But there's another side to Brackett's writing, too little known and too infrequently practiced. She's written several realistic detective novels in the firmest Hammett tradition, and brought the same realism to a few distinguished science fiction stories, including the well-remembered* The Halfling. *Now F&SF is proud to present the latest offering by this Other Brackett: a poignant story of the near future, of the beginnings of interrelation between Earth and Mars as seen and felt by a father, his children . . . and a Martian tweener.*

# The Tweener

*by* LEIGH BRACKETT

A TAXICAB TURNED THE CORNER AND came slowly down the street.

"Here he is!" shrieked the children, tearing open the white gate. "Mother! Dad! He's here, Uncle Fred's here!"

Matt Winslow came out onto the porch, and in a minute Lucille came too, flushed from the purgatory of a kitchen on a July day. The cab stopped in front of the house. Josh and Barbie pounced on it like two small tigers, howling, and from up and down the street the neighbors' young came drifting, not making any noise, recognizing that this was the Winslows' moment and not intruding on it, but wanting to be close to it, to breathe and see and hear the magic.

"Look at them," said Matt, half laughing. "You'd think Fred was Tarzan, Santa Claus, and Superman, all rolled into one."

"Well," said Lucille proudly, "not many people have been where he has."

She went running down the path. Matt followed her. Inside, he was jealous. It was nothing personal, he liked Lucille's brother and respected him. It was only that Josh and Barbie had never had that look in their eyes for him. This was a secret jealousy, that Matt hid carefully, frighteningly, even from himself.



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Fred got out of the cab, trim and soldierly in his uniform with the caduceus on the collar tabs, but forgetting all about dignity as he tried to hug the kids and kiss his sister and shake Matt's hand all at once. "I'll get your bags," said Matt, and the neighbors' children stared with enormous eyes and sent the name of Mars whispering back and forth between them.

"Be careful," Fred said. "That one there, with the handle on it — let me." He lifted it out, a smallish box made from pieces of packing case that still showed Army serial numbers. It had little round holes bored in its top and sides. Fred waved the children back. "Don't joggle it, it's a rare Martian vase I brought back for your mother, and I don't want it broken. Presents for you? Now what do you think of that — I clean forgot! Oh well, there wasn't much out there you'd have wanted, anyway."

"Not even a *rock*?" cried Josh, and Fred shook his head solemnly. "Not a pebble." Barbie was staring at the holes in the box. Matt picked up Fred's suitcase. "He hasn't changed," he thought. "Lost some weight, and got some new lines in his face, but with the kids he hasn't changed. He still acts like one himself." He, too, looked at the holes in the box, but with apprehension. "This is going to be good," he thought. "Something special."

"God, it's hot," said Fred, screwing up his eyes as though the sunlight hurt them. "Ten months on Mars is no way to train up for an eastern summer. Barbie, don't hang on your old uncle, he's having trouble enough." He glanced at Matt and Lucille, grinning ruefully, and made a pantomime of giving at the knees. "I feel as though I'm wading in glue."

"Sit down on the porch," Lucille said. "There's a little breeze —"

"In a minute," Fred said. "But first, don't you want to see your present?" He set the box down, in a shady spot under the big maple at the corner of the house.

"Now Fred, what are you up to?" she demanded suspiciously. "Martian vases, indeed!"

"Well, it's not exactly a vase. It's more of a — *I'll* open it, Josh, you just stand back. This doesn't concern you."

"Oh, Uncle Fred!" wailed Barbie, dancing up and down like a doll on strings. "Open it up, *please* open it up."

Matt had put the suitcase inside the door. Now he came and joined the others under the tree.

Fred opened the lid of the box. Then he sat back on his heels, watching the children's faces, and Matt thought, "He's been waiting for this for nearly a year, dreaming it up . . . he should have married and had kids of his own."

Josh and Barbie let out one mingled cry, and then were still. For a moment.

"Is it really alive?"

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"Can we touch it?"

"Will it bite?"

"Oh, Uncle Fred — oh, *look* — it does belong to us, doesn't it?"

Along the fence small boys and girls impaled their meager bellies on the pickets in an effort to see. Matt and Lucille peered down into the box. On a mat of red sand and dry lichens a thing was crouching, a neat furry thing about the size of a big rabbit and not unlike one in outline, except that its ears were cup-shaped, and except that its coat was mottled in the exact rust red and greenish gray of the native sand and lichens. It looked up at the unfamiliar faces with a sort of mild incuriosity, it's eyes half shut against the glare, but otherwise it did not move.

"What on earth is it?" asked Lucille.

"Nothing," said Fred, "on Earth. On Mars, he's the dominant form of life — or was, until we came. In fact, he's the sole surviving mammal, and almost the sole surviving vertebrate. He doesn't have an official name yet. It'll be years before the zoologists can decide on their classifications. But the boys out there call him tweener."

"What?" said Lucille.

"Tweener. Because he's sort of between things. You know — if anyone asked you what he was like, you'd say he was something between a rabbit and a ground-hog, or maybe between a monkey and a squirrel. Go ahead, Barbie, pick him up."

"Now wait a minute," said Matt. He pushed Barbie back. "Wait just a minute. Fred, are you sure about this thing? Is he safe? I don't want the kids bitten, or catching anything."

"Beside him" said Fred, "a rabbit is dangerous. The tweeners have had no enemies for so long they've forgotten how to fight, and they haven't yet acquired any fear of man. I've pulled 'em out of their burrows with my bare hands."

He reached into the box and lifted the creature gently, clucking to it. "Anyway, this one has been a pet all his life. I picked him especially because of that. He's acclimated to warmer temperatures and approximately Earth-normal atmosphere, from living in a Base hut, and I thought he'd stand the shock of transplanting better." He held the tweener out. "Here, you take him, Matt. You and Lucille. Set your minds at rest."

Matt hesitated, and then received the tweener into his hands. It felt like — well, like an animal. Like any small animal you might pick up. Warm, very thick-furred, perhaps more slight in the bone and light in the muscle than he had expected. It had no tail. Its hind legs were not at all rabbit-like, and its forelegs were longer than he had thought. It placed a paw on his arm, a curious paw with three strong fingers and a thumb, and lifted its head, sniffing. The sunlight was brighter here, falling in a shaft be-

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tween the branches, and the tweener's eyes were almost shut, giving it a look of sleepy imbecility. Matt stroked it awkwardly, once or twice, and it rubbed its head against his arm. Matt shivered. "That soft fur," he said. "It tickles, sort of. Want him, Lucille?"

She looked sternly at Fred. "No germs?"

"No germs."

"All right." She took the tweener the way she would have taken a cat, holding him up under the forelegs and looking him over while he dangled, limp and patient. Finally she smiled. "He's cute. I think I'm going to like him." She set him carefully on his feet in the green grass. "All right, you kids. And be careful you don't hurt him."

Once more Josh and Barbie were speechless, if not silent. They lay on the ground and touched and patted and peered and took turns holding, and the ragged fringe of small bodies on the fence dripped and flowed inward until the yard was full of children and the stranger from Mars was hidden out of sight.

"Kids," said Fred, and laughed. "It's nice to see them again. And normal people."

"What do you mean, normal?"

Fred said wryly, "I had to be doctor *and* psychiatrist. I've had xenophobes crawling all over me for ten long months."

"Xeno — what?" asked Lucille.

"A two-dollar word for men who fear unkown. When chaps got to worrying too much about what was over the horizon, they were dumped on me. But the heck with that. Take me somewhere cool and drown me in beer."

It was a long hot afternoon, and a long hot evening, and they belonged mostly to Fred. To the children he seemed ten feet high and shining with the hero-light. To the neighbors who dropped in to say hello, he was a man who had actually visited a place they still did not quite believe in.

The children, the whole gaggle of them, hunkered in a circle around the chairs that had been dragged to the coolest spot in the yard.

"Is it like in the books, Uncle Fred? Is it?"

Fred groaned, and pointed to the tweener in Barbie's arms. "Get him to tell you. He knows better than I do."

"Of course he does," said Barbie; "John Carter knows everything. But —"

"Who?" asked Fred.

"John Carter. John Carter of Mars."

Fred laughed. "Good. That's a good name. You get it, don't you, Matt? Remember all those wonderful Edgar Rice Burroughs stories about the Warlord of Mars, and the Swordsman of Mars, and the Gods of Mars?"

"Sure," said Matt, rather sourly. "The kids read 'em all the time. John Carter is the hero, the kind

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with a capital H." He turned to the children. "But John Carter was an Earthman, who went to Mars."

"Well," said Josh, scornfully impatient of adult illogic, "*he's* a Martian who came to Earth. It's the same thing. Isn't it, Uncle Fred?"

"You might say that, like the other John Carter, he's a citizen of two worlds."

"Yes," said Barbie. "But anyway, we can't understand his language yet, so you'll have to tell us about Mars."

"Oh, all right," said Fred, and he told them about Mars, about the dark canals and the ruined cities, about the ancient towers standing white and lonely under the twin moons, about beautiful princesses and wicked kings and mighty swordsmen. And after they had gone away again to play with John Carter, Matt shook his head and said, "You ought to be ashamed, filling their heads up with that stuff."

Fred grinned. "Time enough for reality when they grow up."

It got later, and the night closed in. Neighbors came and went. The extra children disappeared. It grew quiet, and finally there was no one left but the Winslows and Fred. Matt went inside to the kitchen for more beer.

From somewhere in the remote darkness beyond the open windows, Barbie screamed.

The can he was opening fell out of Matt's hand, making a geyser of foam where it hit the floor. "If that little — "he said, and did not stop to finish the sentence. He ran out the kitchen door.

Fred and Lucille had jumped up. Barbie's shrieks were coming from the foot of the lot, where the garage was, and now Matt could hear Josh yelling. He ran across the lawn and onto the drive. Lucille was behind him, calling, "Barbie! Josh! What is it?"

In the dim reflection of light from the house, Matt could make out the small figure of Josh bent over and tugging frantically at the handle of the overhead door, which was closed tight. "Help!" he panted. "It's stuck, or something."

Matt brushed him aside. Beyond the door, in the dark garage, Barbie was still screaming. Matt took hold of the handle and heaved.

It was jammed, but not so badly that his greater strength could not force it up. It slid, clicking and grumbling, into place, and Matt rushed into the opening.

Barbie was standing just inside, her mouth stretched over another scream, her cheeks running streams of tears. John Carter was beside her. He was standing on his hind legs, almost erect, and the fingers of one forepaw were gripped tightly around Barbie's thumb. His eyes were wide open. In the kindly night there was no hot glare to bother them. and they looked out, green-gold and very, very bright. Something rose up into Matt's throat and closed it. He reached out, and

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Barbie shook off John Carter's grip and flung herself into Matt's arms.

"Oh, Daddy, it was so dark and Josh couldn't get the door open —"

Josh came in and picked up John Carter. "Aw, girls," he said, quite scornful now that the emergency was over. "Just because she gets stuck in the garage for a few minutes, she has to have hysterics."

"What in the world were you doing?" Lucille demanded weakly, feeling Barbie all over.

"Just playing," said Josh, sulking. "How should I know the old door wouldn't work?"

"She's okay," Fred said. "Just scared."

Lucille groaned deeply "And they wonder why mothers turn gray at an early age. All right, you two, off to bed. Scoot!"

Josh started toward the house with Barbie, still clutching John Carter.

"Oh, no," said Matt. "You're not taking that thing to bed with you." He caught John Carter by the loose skin of his shoulders and pulled him out of the boy's arms. Josh spun around, all ready to make trouble about it, and Fred said smoothly, "I'll take him."

He did, holding him more gently than Matt. "Your father's right, Josh. No pets in the bedroom. And anyway, John Carter wouldn't be comfortable there. He likes a nice cool place where he can dig his own house and make the rooms just to suit him."

"Like a catacomb?" asked Barbie, in a voice still damp and tremulous.

"Or a cave?" asked Josh.

"Exactly. Now you run along, and your father and I will fix him up."

"Well," said Josh. "Okay." He held out a finger and John Carter wrapped a paw around it. Josh shook hands solemnly. "Good night." Then he looked up. "Uncle Fred, if he digs like a woodchuck, how come his front feet are like a monkey's?"

"Because," said Fred, "he didn't start out to be a digger. And he is much more like an ape than a woodchuck. But there haven't been any trees in his country for a long time, and he had to take to the ground anyway to keep warm. That's what we call adaptation." He turned to Matt. "How about the old root cellar? It'd be ideal for him, if you're still not using it for anything.

"No," said Matt slowly. "I'm not using it." He looked at John Carter in the dim light from the house, and John Carter looked back at him with those bright unearthly eyes.

Matt put a hand up to his head, aware that it had begun to ache. "My sinus is kicking up — probably going to rain tomorrow. I think I'll turn in myself, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead, honey," Lucille said. "I'll help Fred with the tweener."

Matt took two aspirin on top of his beer, which made him feel no better, and retired into a heavy sleep, through which stalked dark

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and unfamiliar dreams that would not show their faces.

The next day was Sunday. It did not rain, but Matt's head went on aching.

"Are you sure it's your sinus?" Lucille asked.

"Oh, yes. All in the right side, frontal and maxillary. Even my teeth hurt."

"Hm," said Fred. "Don't ever go to Mars. Sinusitis is an occupational hazard there, in spite of oxygen masks. Something about the difference in pressure that raises hob with terrestrial insides. Why, do you know —"

"No," said Matt sourly, "and I don't want to know. Save your gruesome stories for your medical conference."

Fred winced. "I wish you hadn't mentioned that. I hate the thought of New York in this kind of weather. Damn it, it's cruelty to animals. And speaking of which —" he turned to Josh and Barbie — "keep John Carter in the cellar until this heat wave breaks. At least it's fairly cool down there. Remember he wasn't built for this climate, nor for this world. Give him a break."

"Oh, we will," said Barbie earnestly. "Besides, he's busy, building his castle. You ought to see the wall he's making around it."

Working slowly, resting often, John Carter had begun the construction of an elaborate burrow in the soft floor of the old root cellar. They went down and watched him from time to time, bringing up earth and then patting and shaping it with his clever paws into a neat rampart to protect his front door. "To deflect wind and sand," Fred said, and Barbie, watching with fascinated eyes, murmured, "I'll bet he could build anything he wanted to, if he was big enough."

"Maybe. Matter of fact, he probably was a good bit bigger once, a long time ago when things weren't so tough. But —"

"As big as me?" asked Josh.

"Possibly. But if he built anything then we haven't been able to find it. Or anything at all that *anybody* built. Except, of course," he added hastily, "those cities I was telling you about."

The heat wave broke that night in a burst of savage line-squalls. "That's what my head was complaining about," thought Matt, rousing up to blink at the lightning. And then he slept again, and dreamed, dim sad dreams of loss and yearning. In the morning his head still ached.

Fred went down to New York for his conference. Matt went to the office and stewed, finding it hard to keep his mind on his work with the nagging pain in the side of his skull. He began to worry. He had never had a bout go on this long. He fidgeted more and more as the day wore on, and then hurried home oppressed by a vague unease that he could find no foundation for.

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"All right?" Lucille echoed. "Of course everything's all right. Why?"

"I don't know. Nothing. The kids —?"

"They've been playing Martian all day. Matt, I've never seen them so tickled with anything in their lives as they are with that little beastie. And he's so cute and patient with them. Come here a minute."

She led him to the door of the children's room, and pointed in. Josh and Barbie arrayed in striped beach towels and some of Lucille's junkier costume jewelry, were engaged in a complicated ritual that involved much posturing and waving of wooden swords. In the center of the room enthroned on a chair, John Carter sat. He had a length of bright cloth wrapped around him and a gold bracelet on his neck. He sat perfectly still, watching the children with his usual half-lidded stare, and Matt said harshly, "It isn't right."

"What isn't?"

"Any ordinary animal wouldn't stand for it. Look at him, just squatting there like a —" He hunted for a word and couldn't find it.

"The gravity," Lucille reminded him. "He hardly moves at all, poor little thing. And it seems quite hard for him to breathe."

Josh and Barbie knelt side by side in front of the throne, holding their swords high in the air. "*Kaor!*" they cried to John Carter, and then Josh stood up again and began to talk in gibberish, but respectfully, as though addressing a king.

"That's Martian," said Lucille, and winked at Matt. "Sometimes you'd swear they were actually speaking a language. Come on and stretch out on the couch a while, honey, why don't you? You look tired."

"I am tired," he said. "And I —" He stopped.

"What?"

"Nothing." No, nothing at all. He lay down on the couch. Lucille went into the kitchen. He could hear her moving about, making the usual noises. Faintly, far off, he heard the children's voices. Sometimes you'd swear they were actually speaking a language. Sometime you'd swear —

No. No you wouldn't. You know what is, and what isn't. Even the kids know.

He dozed, and the children's voices crept into his dream. They spoke in the thin and icy wind and murmured in the dust that blew beneath it, and there was no doubt at all now that they were speaking a tongue they knew and understood. He called to them, but they did not answer, and he knew that they did not want to answer, that they were hiding from him somewhere among the ridges of red sand that flowed and shifted so that there was never a trail or a landmark. He ran among the dunes, shouting their names, and then there was a tumble of ancient rock where a

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mountain had died, and a hollow place below it with a tinge of green around a meager pool. He knew that they were there in that hollow place. He raced toward it, racing the night that deepened out of a sky already dark and flecked with stars, and in the dusk a shape rose up and blocked his way. It bore in its right hand a blade of grass — no, a sword. A sword, and its face was shadowed, but its eyes looked out at him, green-gold and bright and not of the Earth —

"For heaven's sake, Matt — wake up!" Lucille was shaking him. He sprang up, still in the grip of his dream, and saw Josh and Barbie standing on the other side of the room. They had their ordinary clothes on, and they were grinning, and Barbie said, "How can you have a nightmare when it's still daytime?"

"I don't know," said Lucille, "but it must have been a dandy. Come on Matt, and get your dinner, before the neighbors decide I'm beating you."

"Other people's nightmares," Matt snarled, "are always so funny. Where's John Carter?"

"Oh, we put him back down cellar," Josh said, quite unconcerned. "Mom, will you get him some more lettuce tomorrow? He sure goes for it."

Feeling shamefaced and a little sick, Matt sat down and ate his dinner. He did not enjoy it. Nor did he sleep well that night, starting up more than once from the verge of an ugly dream. Next day Gulf Tropical had come in again worse than before, and his head had not stopped aching.

He went to his doctor, who could find no sign of infection but gave him a shot on general principles. He went to his office, but it was only a gesture. He returned home at noon on a two-day sick leave. The temperature had crept up to ninety and the humidity dripped out of the air in sharp crashing showers.

"I'll bet Fred's suffering in New York," Lucille said. "And poor John Carter! I haven't let the kids take him out of the cellar at all."

"Do you know what he did, Daddy?" Barbie said. "Josh found it this morning after you left."

"What?" asked Matt, with an edge in his voice.

"A hole," said Josh. "He must've tunneled right under the foundation. It was in the lawn, just outside where the root cellar is. I guess he's used to having a back door to his castle, but I filled it in. I filled it real good and put a great big stone on top."

Matt relaxed. "He'll only dig another."

Barbie shook her head. "He better not. I told him what would happen if he did, how a big dog might kill him, or he might get lost and never find his way home again."

"Poor little tyke," Lucille said. "He'll never find *his* home again."

"Oh, the hell with him," Matt said

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angrily. "Couldn't you waste a little sympathy on me? I feel lousy."

He went upstairs away from them and tried to lie down, but the room was a sweat-box. He tossed and groaned and came down again, and Lucille fixed him iced lemonade. He sat in the shade on the back porch and drank it. It hit his stomach cold and sour-sweet and it tied him in knots, and he got up to pace the lawn. The heat weighed and dragged at him. His head throbbed and his knees felt weak. He passed the place where Josh had filled in the new tunnel, and from the cellar window he heard the children's voices. He turned around and stamped back into the house.

"What are you doing down there?" he shouted, through the open cellar door.

Barbie's answer came muffled and hollow from the gloom below. "We brought John Carter some ice to lick on, but he won't come out." She began to talk in a different tone, softly, crooning, calling. Matt said, "Come up out of there before you catch cold!"

"In a minute," Josh said.

Matt went down the steps, his shoes thumping on the wooden treads. They had not turned on the lights, and what came through the small dusty windows was only enough to show the dim outlines of things. He banged his head on a heating duct and swore, and Barbie said rather impatiently, "We said we'd be up in a minute."

"What's the matter?" Matt demanded, blundering around the furnace. "Am I not supposed to come down here any more?"

"Sh-h!" Josh told him. "There, he's just coming out. Don't scare him back in again!"

The door of the root cellar was open. The children were crouched inside it, by the earthen rampart John Carter had constructed with such labor. In the circle of the rampart was a dark hole, and from it John Carter was emerging, very slowly, his eyes luminescent in the gloom. Barbie put two ice cubes on the ground before him, and he set his muzzle against them and lay panting, his flanks pulsing in a shallow, uneven rhythm.

"You'll be all right," Josh told him, and stroked his head. To Matt he said, "You don't understand how important he is. There isn't another kid anywhere around who has a real genuine Martian for a pet."

"Come on," said Matt harshly. "Upstairs." The clammy air was making him shiver. Reluctantly the children rose and went past him. John Carter did not stir. He looked at Matt, and Matt drew back, slamming the door shut. He followed the children out of the cellar, but in his mind's eye he could still see John Carter crouched behind his wall in the dark, tortured by a world that was not his, a world too big, too hot, too heavy.

Crouched behind his wall in the dark, and thinking.

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No. Animals do not think. They feel. They can be lost, or frightened, or suffering, or a lot of things, but they're all feelings, not thoughts. Only humans think.

On Earth.

Matt went out in the yard again. He went clear to the back of it where the fence ran along the alley, and took hold of the pickets in his two hands. He stood there staring at the neighbor's back fences, at their garages and garbage cans, not seeing them, feeling the vague conviction that had been in the back of his mind grow and take shape and advance to a point where he could no longer pretend he didn't see it.

"No," he said to himself. "Fred would have known. The scientists would know. It couldn't be, and not be known."

Or couldn't it? How did you measure possibility on another world?

The only mammal, Fred had said, and almost the only vertebrate. Why should one sole species survive when all the others were gone, unless it had an edge to begin with, an advantage?

Suppose a race. Suppose intelligence. Intelligence, perhaps, of a sort that human men, Earthly men, would not understand.

Suppose a race and a world. A dying world. Suppose that race being forced to change with its dying, to dwindle and adapt, to lose its cities and its writings and inventions, or whatever had taken the place of them, but not its mind. Never its mind, because mind would be the only barrier against destruction.

Suppose that race, physically altered, environmentally destitute, driven inward on its own thoughts. Wouldn't it evolve all kinds of mental compensations, powers no Earthman would suspect or look for because he would be thinking in terms of what he knew, of Earthly life-forms? And wouldn't such a race go to any lengths to hide its intelligence, its one last weapon, from the strangers who had come trampling in to take its world away?

Matt trembled. He looked up at the sky, and he knew what was different about it. It was no longer a solid shell that covered him. It was wide open, ripped and torn by the greedy ships, carrying the greedy men who had not been content with what they had. And through those rents the Outside had slipped in, and it would never be the same again. Never more the safe familiar Earth containing only what belonged to it, only what men could understand.

He stood there while a shower of rain crashed down and drenched him, and he did not feel it.

Then again, fiercely, Matt said, "No. I won't believe that, it's too — it's like the kids believing their games while they play them."

But were they only games?

He started at the sound of Lucille's

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voice calling him in. He knew by the sound of it she was worried. He went back toward the house. She came part way to meet him, demanding to know what he was doing out in the rain. He let her chivvy him into the house and into dry clothes, and he kept telling her there was nothing wrong, but she was alarmed now and would not listen. "You lie down." she said and covered him with a quilt, and then he heard her go downstairs and get on the telephone. He lay quiet for a few minutes, trying to get himself in hand, frightened and half ashamed of the state of his nerves. Sweat began to roll off him. He kicked the quilt away. The air inside the room was thick with moisture, heavy, stale. He found himself panting like —

Hell, it was no different from any summer heat wave, the bedroom was always hot and suffocating. It was always hard to breathe.

He left it and went downstairs.

Lucille was just getting up from the phone. "Who were you calling?" he asked.

"Fred," she said, giving him that no-nonsense look she got when she decided that something had to be done. "He said he'd be here in the morning. I'm going to find out what's the matter with you."

Matt said irritably, "But my doctor —"

"Your doctor doesn't know you like Fred does, and he doesn't care as much about you, either."

Matt grumbled, but it was too late to do anything about it now. Then he began to think that maybe Fred was the answer. Maybe if he told him —

What?

All right, drag it out, put it into words. I think John Carter is more than a harmless little beast. I think he's intelligent. I think that he hates me, that he hates this Earth where he's been brought so casually as a pet. I think he's doing something to my children.

Could he say that to Fred?

Lucille was calling the children for supper. "Oh lord, they're down in that damp cellar again. Josh, Barbie, come up here this minute!"

Matt put his head between his hands. It hurt.

He slept downstairs that night, on the living room couch. He had done that before during heatwaves. It gave the illusion of being cooler. He dosed himself heavily with aspirin, and for a time he lapsed into a drugged slumber full of dark shapes that pursued him over a landscape he could not quite see but which he knew was alien and hateful. Then in the silent hours between midnight and dawn he started up in panic. He could not breathe. The air was as thick as water, and a weight as of mountain ranges lay along his chest, his thighs, his shoulders.

He turned on a lamp and began to move up and down, his chest heav-

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ing, his hands never still, a glassy terror spreading over him, sheathing him as a sleet storm sheathes a tree.

The living room looked strange, the familiar things overlaid with a gloss of fear, traces everywhere of Josh and Barbie, of Lucille and himself, suddenly significant, suddenly sharp and poignantly symbolic as items in a Dali painting. Lucille's lending-library novel with the brown paper cover, Lucille's stiff Staffordshire figures on the mantel staring with their stiff white faces. An empty pop bottle, no, two empty pop bottles shoved guiltily behind the couch. Small blue jacket with the pocket torn, a drift of comic books under the lamp, his own chair with the cushion worn hollow by his own sitting. Patterns. Wall-paper, slipcovers, rug. Colors, harsh and queer. He was aware of the floor beneath his feet. It was thin. It was a skim of ice over a black pool, ready to crack and let him fall, into the place where the stranger lay, and thought, and waited.

All over Mars they lie and wait, he thought, in their places under the ground. Thinking back and forth in the bitter nights, hating the men, human men who pull them out of their burrows and kill them and dissect them and pry at their brains and bones and nerves and organs. The men who tie little strings around their necks and put them in cages, and never think to look behind their eyes and see what lurks there.

Hating, and wanting their world back. Hating, and quietly driving men insane.

Just as this one is doing to me, he thought. He's suffering. He's crushed in this gravity, and strangling in this air, and he's going to make me suffer too. He knows he can never go home. He knows he's dying. How far can he push it? Can he only make me feel what he's feeling, or can he . . .?

Suppose he can. Suppose he knows I'm going to tell Fred. Suppose he stops me.

After that, what? Josh? Barbie? Lucille?

Matt stood still in the middle of the floor. "He's killing me," he thought. "He knows."

He began to shake. The room turned dark in front of him. He wanted to vomit, but there was a strange paralysis creeping over him, tightening his muscles, knotting them into ropes to bind him. He felt cold, as though he were already dead.

He turned. He did not run, he was past running, but he walked faster with every step, stiffly, like a mechanical thing wound up and accelerating toward a magnetic goal. He opened the cellar door, and the steps took him down. He remembered to switch on the light.

It was only a short distance to the north corner, and the half-open door.

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John Carter made a sound, the only one Matt had ever heard him make. A small thin shriek, purely animal and quite, quite brainless.

It was the next morning, and Fred had come on the early train. They were standing, all of them, grouped together on the lawn near the back fence, looking down. The children were crying.

"A dog must have got him," Matt said. He had said that before, but his voice still lacked the solid conviction of a statement known and believed. He wanted to look up and away from what lay on the ground by his feet, but he did not. Fred was facing him.

"Poor little thing," said Lucille. "I suppose it must have been a dog. Can you tell, Fred?"

Fred bent over. Matt stared at his own shoes. Inside his pockets, his hands were curled tightly into fists. He wanted to talk. The temptation, the longing, the lust to talk was almost more than he could endure. He put the edges of his tongue between his teeth and bit it.

After a minute Fred said, "It was a dog."

Matt glanced at him, and now it was Fred who scowled at his shoes.

"I hope it didn't hurt him," Lucille said.

Fred said, "I don't think it did."

Miserably, between his sobs, Josh wailed, "I used the biggest stone I could find. I never thought he could have moved it."

"There, now," said Lucille, putting her arms around the children. She led them away toward the house, talking briskly, the usual mixture of nonsense and sound truth that parents administer at such times. Matt wanted to go away too, but Fred made no move, and somehow he knew that it was no use going. He stood with his head down, feeling the sun beat on the back of it like a hammer on a flinching anvil.

He wished Fred would say something. Fred remained silent.

Finally Matt said. "Thanks."

"I didn't see any reason to tell them. They'd find it hard to understand."

"Do *you* understand?" Matt cried out. "I don't. Why did I do such a thing? How could I have done such a thing?"

"Fear. I think I mentioned that once. Xenophobia."

"But that's not — I mean, I don't see how it applies."

"It's not just a fear of unknown places, but of unknown *things*. Anything at all that's strange and unfamiliar." He shook his head. "I'll admit I didn't expect to find that at home, but I should have thought of the possibility. It's something to remember."

"I was so sure," Matt said. "It all fitted together, everything."

"The human imagination is a wonderful thing. I know, I've just put in ten months nursing it. I suppose you had symptoms?"

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"God, yes." Matt enumerated them. "Last night it got so bad I thought —" He glanced at the small body by his feet. "As soon as I did that it all went away. Even the headache. What's the word? Psycho-something?

"Psychosomatic. Yes. The guys out there developed everything from corns to angina, scared of where they were and wanting to leave it."

"I'm ashamed," Matt said. "I feel . . ." He moved his hands.

"Well," said Fred, "it was only an animal. Probably it wouldn't have lived long anyway. I shouldn't have brought it."

"Oh for Chrissake," Matt said, and turned away. Josh and Barbie were coming out of the house again. Josh carried a box, and Barbie had a bunch of flowers and a spade. They passed by the place on the lawn where the big stone had been moved and the hole opened up again — only part way, and from the outside, but Matt hoped they would not know that. He hoped they would not ever know that.

He went to meet them.

He kneeled down and put an arm around each of them. "Don't feel bad," he said desperately. "Look I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go and find the best place in the country to buy a pup. Wouldn't you like that, a fine new puppy, all your own?"

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## *Coming Next Month*

F&SF is happy to announce the advent, in its next issue (on the stands in early February), of the Hokas, that wonderfully comic race of interstellar mimics created by Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson. Perhaps you've read elsewhere the earlier exploits of these delightful teddybear-like threats to the sanity of the Galaxy; henceforth their adventures will appear exclusively in F&SF, starting with a novelet in which the Hokas, inspired as always by their loyal study of Terran culture, set up a piratical civilization, complete with Spanish Main, cutlasses, yardarms and all other requisites. The title is, inevitably, *Yo Ho Hoka!* The issue will also contain a striking science fiction novelet, *The Short Ones*, by the rapidly rising young writer Raymond E. Banks, and short stories by such luminaries as Frank Gruber, Idris Seabright, James Blish, John Anthony, and F&SF's highly individual discovery, Avram Davidson (remember *My Boyfriend's Name is Jello*?) — plus a detailed survey of science-fantasy publishing in 1954 and a checklist of the year's outstanding books.

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ANGELS AND SPACESHIPS, *the title of a recent and admirable book by Fredric Brown, is not a bad definition of the gamut of man's imaginings. No matter how much evidence may be amassed by scholars to prove the existence (in some time, at some place) of one or the other, none of us expects to see either an angel or a spaceship tomorrow. But there's some question, Mr. Porges slyly suggests, as to which might first be used to try to solve the problems of this tormented globe.*

# *The Tidings*

*by* ARTHUR PORGES

IN THROUGH MY WINDOW FLEW THIS archangel.

That's as good a place to hook it as any, short of starting at the beginning — and I mean the Beginning. I was mixed up with this business from the first, and my published reports didn't tell the whole story by any means. Now that everybody's taking it all so seriously, a few marginal notes might help.

It's not very surprising, when you consider the situation — the desire for publicity — that one of the angels called on me among the first. After all, my column does reach at least as many readers as Winchell's, and on a more literate level. I can't actually prove that the other dozen or so Divine Messengers didn't get to their men earlier, but my paper hit the stands ahead of its rivals. Besides, mine was an archangel, remember. A fine, personable chap, even if rather naïve. I'll call it "him," although there's no way of telling. Put it down to a male superiority complex.

I know what you're thinking: that this is one hell of a time to get flippant. Maybe so, but it's the only way I can write, and furthermore, I've never taken mankind or its ultimate fate very much to heart. Frankly, I prefer Siamese cats. Do me something.

It was a hot evening, that red letter one when all the fuss began. My window was wide open; I was having a last pipe before reworking a stubborn column. A column I never did use, come to think of it. Anyway, in through my window flew this archangel.

"Leonard J. Irwin," he cried in a ringing, melodious voice. "I bring a message."

Newspaper men can't ever admit



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to being surprised by anything that happens; and right here, in print, I'll deny getting excited. I looked him over very calmly. Handsome; smooth, boyish face; golden hair, quite curly; Grecian type robes; and, of course, wings. Utterly, hopelessly non-aerodynamic, those wings. You'll never convince me that angels actually fly with them. It's just teleportation, or something.

"Leonard J. Irwin," he repeated (we never got to the first-name stage — *he* wouldn't even drop the initial); "the One who sent me is wroth with humanity." This angel threw in an archaic Biblical phrase here and there, but his English was otherwise like anybody else's.

I managed to answer without too much embarrassment. And give me credit for not gasping out, "Who are you?" Any damn fool could see. When a character with wings and sandals flits through a window ten stories up, it's obvious he didn't come from Gimbel's.

"I'm a little wroth myself," I replied, showing great self-possession. "And so are a lot of other people. We've been hoping, in fact, that Somebody would take a hand and put things in order before it's too late. Welcome, and thrice welcome."

"So," he said, looking at me fixedly, "there is some concern."

"Concern!" I exploded. "Hell, yes!" He winced, and I knew he didn't come from There. "Do you think we like what's going on in Russia, or China, or —"

"Or anywhere else," he cut in very coldly.

"Touché," I admitted. "There's a bit of skulduggery here and there in the U. S., too. Who am I to deny it? But what's the remedy? I may be a pessimist, but to me man is a disgusting animal. Personally, without being reactionary, I think another flood — warm water, if you don't mind —"

"Peace! The Prime Intelligence cannot repeat."

"Then it's pretty hopeless. You need something with teeth in it. There are too many places on earth where physical pain is a weapon of state as well as a personal, psychopathic pick-me-up for assorted bully-boys. How are you going to teach these jolly folks the Brotherhood of Man?"

"We have the means, and they will not fail. Hark!"

I cringed at that *Hark*. It always suggests third-rate verse. "Yes?" I prompted him.

"My Master has decreed the following new law for humanity. Hear it, remember it, make it known to all the world. *Whosoever inflicts wanton pain upon another shall, at the same time, and in the same degree, feel such pain himself.*" I could almost hear his unspoken epilogue: "How's that for a neat ordinance?"

"Well," I began doubtfully, "it seems pretty cute, but —"

"But what?" The archangel sounded a little piqued by my lack

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of enthusiasm for his ingenious ukase. You see, he hadn't lived through the Volstead Era, and probably was ignorant of the peculiar mores of motorists.

"I don't think it'll work, that's all."

"And why not?" He seemed indignant. "It's flawless. If one man hurts another for no reason, he'll feel the same pain himself. By this token, nobody will be in a hurry to maltreat the next fellow. Yet the word 'wanton' leaves room for the duties of surgeons and other justifiable pain-givers. In a matter of weeks, man will learn to respect the sanctity of the individual, and do that which is right. Besides, a whole council of elder angels approved the law's soundness. Amen, I say unto thee, there are no loopholes."

"Maybe they did, but you angels — excuse my candor — are an ivory tower bunch, I'm afraid. Now, I don't know just how people — some people — will get around your neat commandment, but believe me, when it comes to evading laws in order to do himself dirt, man is the all-time, copper-riveted, no-holds-barred champion of the universe. It takes a newspaper hack, not an angel, to realize that." I was feeling unusually bitter, having just had dealings with a used car dealer known far and wide as Saintly Sam.

"Unhappy man!" the angel reproved me. "O thou of little faith!" Then, with a more businesslike ring: "Enforceable or not, see that the law gets known immediately."

When he took that tone, I didn't mess around. "Yessir," I said. "Right away."

"Then my job's done. Woe to the multitude if they transgress! So long." And gathering his robe close, he dived head-first out of my window. My stomach turned over, but when there was no clatter in the florist's stall, ten stories down, I guessed he'd made flying speed okay.

Well, at first, as you all know, things looked good. Reports began to pile in. The small town sheriff who tried to pistol-whip a bum, and yelped in agony at the first blow. And the rapist who suddenly felt all the shock and terror of his prospective victim. They both fled screaming in opposite directions, she unharmed, he unlikely to try again, and certain to fail in any case. And yet it wasn't long before other stories, unpleasant ones, hit the big dailies.

Sure enough, the archangel came back. My window was closed, but when he fluttered around the glass like an outsize moth, I let him in. He seemed glad to alight on something solid again. It must be quite a long trip from There to here, and not especially congenial. No doubt our ambassador to Moscow would understand the angel's attitude.

I didn't say anything. Why rub

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it in? And after a minute he remarked dolefully, "Man is certainly tricky. Rebellion and sedition against the Law flourish like the green bay tree."

"Which particular ingenuity are you thinking of?" I asked him, although I had a pretty good idea.

"That trick in totalitarian countries — and a few others — of using masochists to inflict the lighter punishments. And the much more nasty device of lining up fifty or a hundred fanatic party men, and having each person give the victim one lash, or one burn, or one similar agony, thus dividing the poor fellow's torment among many executioners." He shook his golden head. "Diabolical!"

"Yes," I agreed. "I doubt if my Managing Editor could top that stunt, and I'm sure he works for the D — the other side."

"I'm glad you have the decency not to mention that name in my presence," he said frostily. "But if you're implying man isn't to blame —"

"Not at all, but don't say I didn't warn you." I spoke with a touch of complacency. To be honest, I was perversely proud of man's genius for law evasion. Still, I thought there was something to be said in our behalf. "It's only a few. Most people are quite innocent —"

"There are no innocent humans," he replied flatly. "Only a small number less guilty. Anyhow, it won't happen again."

"Ah," I said. "You've accepted my advice about the flood. Good. I suggest —"

"No. The law has been amended. There will be no evasion, now." Once again he stood erect, putting on his hanging face. "Hark! O Leonard J. Irwin: *Whosoever inflicts wanton pain upon another shall, at the same time, feel the same variety of pain, but multiplied a thousandfold.* You will note," he added somewhat smugly, "that even a single whiplash would be unendurable for the smiter. No more division of pain."

"Your laws are too literal and specialized," I protested. "And that's the trouble. If you'd merely make everybody incapable of evil —"

"Please don't try to teach us our business," he snubbed me. "Man must have free will to work out his own salvation if such an end is to come to pass."

"Any more laws," I told him, "and man will be about as free as the folks in Stalingrad on May Day. Why not do it right?" He ignored me, so I said: "You'll be back."

He gave me a solemn shake of the head, then jumped, feet first this time. When I peeked out, he was heading straight up in the general direction of Antares.

But, of course, he was back in six weeks. It was inevitable. And he had bags under his eyes.

"Now what?" I asked him, since the rumors from certain countries were rather confusing. One said

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that physiologists had found a way of stimulating particular nerves so that when the victim felt an unbearable twinge, the same stimulation multiplied a thousand times became merely a pleasant tonic to the torturer.

The archangel, very downcast, admitted this was so, and worse, some people had found another loophole in the new law: the use of animals — wild ones, that is, in ironic distinction from the animal, man.

"Hearken unto me," he complained. "They send the teeth of beasts upon them, or the stings of angry bees. The creatures inflict pain, but not wantonly. Few lower animals are capable of wantonness. As we conceived the law, wild beasts and insects do not feel the pain they cause; and even if they did, nothing would change. A lion in agony would attack all the harder, mad with torment."

"But surely," I objected, "the person who turned the animals against his fellows is the guilty party."

"Verily, O Leonard J. Irwin," the angel admitted with some confusion, "but we never dreamed of such perverted inventiveness. If one man lures another into a chamber full of savage beasts, all he'll feel is whatever apprehension the victim suffers *before* the brutes take over. A clever villain can contrive to lead his enemy to doom without arousing any fear until it's too late. I wonder," he added bitterly, "who thought of using wild animals?"

"I don't know, but one'll get you ten that plenty of brilliant characters came up with the idea simultaneously. We have no lack of imaginative thinkers. This planet is lousy with such talent."

"So I see. But there won't be any more loopholes in the law. It's been carefully revi —"

"Wanna bet?"

He gave me one look from his amber, cold-lit eyes, and I felt as if I'd been caught scribbling a mustache on the Mona Lisa.

"This is the new law," he intoned, not even standing up. Apparently he was tired of making a big show of the legislation and then having the rug pulled out from under his very humanitarian statutes. "*Whenever wanton pain, or even discomfort, is inflicted by any human, using any agency whatever, upon another human, every person in the whole world not already undergoing maltreatment shall feel such pain or discomfort in the same degree.*"

He looked at me triumphantly, and I thought it over. No more use of animals. The one employing them would feel the pain. Good. Frankly, I was almost ready to admit that this might be It. He saw my hesitation, and his dour expression brightened.

"They can't get around that," he exulted. "Garments will wax old upon you ere —"

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"I won't give you ten-to-one odds," I told him, "but if you're interested in even money —?"

"Don't be idiotic," he retorted. "This is no game." He stepped to the window sill. "I doubt if I'll be back. This law is sound and finds favor in our sight, so —"

"I'll make it three-to-one," I said hastily, my confidence in mankind returning. But he was gone, making a whoosh like a jet plane. I think he hurried to avoid temptation. There's something about gambling that not even an angel can resist.

Well, I'm almost up to date, now. He was back last night. I'd never seen his face so coldly aloof, so stern, so essentially withdrawn.

"Okay, tell Poppa — how did they scuttle you this time?"

There was a blending of respect and loathing in his tones. "They torture people in pairs," he said. "They put one man naked in a refrigeration room at ten below zero Fahrenheit, and another in a steam-heated cell at 130 degrees. Both men suffer terribly, but every other human being feels a combination of minus ten and plus 130 degrees, which is the same, obviously" — here he glanced at the scribblings on one broad wing-feather — "as a not uncomfortable 60 degrees."

"So," I said, a bit sarcastically, "you're back with The Solution. Well, I'm all ears. This one ought to sew us up tight."

"No," he replied, his voice like a deep-tolling bell. "I have an altogether different message — a final one. Man is now on his own for good. My Superior is herewith abdicating all responsibility for whatever happens on earth in the future. Howl, O gate; cry, O city!"

He made it sound pretty awful, and for a moment I felt chilled. "I guess He's within His rights," I said humbly. I paused, thinking back over the long irrational, bloody, wholly incomprehensible history of the human race. There was something I'd always felt, and this was a perfect chance to express it. The verdict was in, and the angel seemed to think we should creep away utterly stricken. If there was any justice in this sentence, it eluded me.

"But what?" the angel demanded, crouching for his last takeoff. "I charge thee speak, O Leonard J. —"

"The Abdication," I said boldly, looking him right in the eye. "If you hadn't told us, we'd never even know the difference."

He left without answering. I imagine there was nothing he could say.

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# Recommended Reading

*by* THE EDITOR

NEXT MONTH WE'LL HAVE F&SF's special annual book department: a complete survey of science-fantasy publishing during the past year, with an annotated list of the year's outstanding books. This month the space for books is a little short, but enough to allow some last-minute notes on the publications of late 1954.

*Anthologies:* The year's twenty-second and twenty-third (and, I venture to hope, last) anthologies are, by good fortune, among the best, and strongly recommended even to the anthology-jaded. THE BEST SCIENCE-FICTION STORIES: 1954 (Fell, $3.50*) is one of the most satisfactory of the always indispensable Bleiler-Dikty annuals — if I can judge it impersonally: 5 of the 13 stories, representing 50% of the wordage, are from F&SF. I think even rival editors will admit that such stories as Ward Moore's *Lot* and J. T. McIntosh's *One in Three Hundred* do belong among the best, just as I happily welcome topnotch stories by Fritz Leiber and William Morrison from *Galaxy* and by Walter M. Miller, Jr. and the Clifton-Apostolides team from *Astounding*. (Note: A number of the stories have been previously reprinted; but I don't feel that's an objection in the case of a volume aiming at such definitive representation of the year's best.) BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE AND TIME (Random, $2.95*) is edited by Judith Merril — a fact sufficient in itself to mean imperative purchase. Add that it deals with those odd aspects of the human mind known as psi-phenomena and that it contains unusually fine unreprinted stories by Phillip K. Dick, Isaac Asimov, Theodore R. Cogswell and many others (including 4 F&SF stories), plus a delightful preface by Theodore Sturgeon and notes and bibliography by the editor, and what more can you ask?

*Novels:* There's been a spate of novels this year by Old Space Hand Murray Leinster: 3 earlier and 3 more to report on now. Best of the lot is the cheapest, THE BRAIN-STEALERS (Ace, 35c; serialized in *Startling* in 1947 as THE MAN IN THE IRON CAP), in which an overfamiliar theme (invasion of earth by parasitic telepaths) is developed so convincingly and excitingly that it seems spang new again. THE FORGOTTEN PLANET (Gnome, $2.50*; rewritten from stories in *Amazing* in



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1927) is an interminable sequence of wars against giant insects, which seems pretty outmoded today. OPERATION: OUTER SPACE (Fantasy Press, $3*; never previously published) has fun satirizing the conquest of space under TV-commercial sponsorship; only a slight lack of genuine bite and emotion (cf. Kornbluth's stories on similar themes) keeps it from being a front-ranker. Poul Anderson deserts science fiction for absolute epic fantasy in THE BROKEN SWORD (Abelard-Schuman, $2.75*), a magnificent saga of the interplay of gods, demigods, faerie, heroes and men in the Ninth Century; if, like me, you find clarion exaltation in the works of H. Rider Haggard or E. R. Eddison, this is on no account to be missed. Jeffery Lloyd Castle's SATELLITE E ONE (Dodd, Mead, $3*) is, I reluctantly suppose, worthwhile for its detailed factual thinking about satellite problems; it is also easily the year's dullest novel.

*Juveniles:* The satellite theme comes off much better in Lester del Rey's STEP TO THE STARS (Winston, $2*), in which comparable fact-probability is fused with a good study of a boy's emergence from adolescence into manhood. Also recommended: LUCKY STARR AND THE OCEANS OF VENUS (Doubleday, $2.50*), much the best of this series by Paul French [Isaac Asimov], combining plausible adventure, interesting alien life-forms and a sound detective story, and Andre Norton's THE STARS ARE OURS (World, $2.75*), a good adventure story of resistance to an anti-science dictatorship and a pleasing travelog of man's first alien planet. An unclassifiable juvenile item is the adventure of Tom Corbett, Space Cadet, arranged for the View-Master by Florence Thomas. The story is slight and passable; the stereoscopic reproduction is extraordinarily fine, and the portrayals of alien life and of deep space have great charm and authentic beauty. For details of the View-Master, this astonishing modern stereopticon, write to Sawyer's Inc., Box 490, Portland, Ore.

*Humor:* I don't think F&SF readers need more than an announcement of the availability of Walt Kelly's THE INCOMPLEAT POGO (Simon & Schuster, $1*), a collection (better integrated than earlier annuals) of the 1953 daily strips of this incomparable comic. You might find a mad kind of entertainment, certainly verging on fantasy, in DALI'S MUSTACHE (Simon & Schuster, $1.50*), in which the Spanish surrealist and photographer Philippe (THE FRENCHMAN) Halsman join forces in a deliberate (and highly successful) attempt "to create a work of major preposterousness." There are only a few fantasy cartoons (but good ones) in Bill Yates's TOO FUNNY FOR WORDS (Dell, 25c); but the idea of an anthology of captionless cartoons is so admirable and the choices so amusing that it deserves recommendation here.

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*History and Bibliography:* Very few regular science-fantasy readers are, in the technical sense, *fans;* but even those who have (to my mind, mistakenly) shunned fan-activity will find much of interest in Sam Moskowitz' THE IMMORTAL STORM ($5; order from Carson F. Jacks, ASFO Press, 713 Coventry Road, Decatur, Ga.), a 135,000-word history of every least action of organized fandom from 1930 to 1939. Never has so much been written about so little; the result is a unique document not without a good deal of social and psychological value. Charles Lee Riddle's THE 1953 CHECKDEX (25c; order from Riddle, 108 Durham St., Norwich, Conn.) is a complete listing by author of all stories in all of the 39 (!) science-fantasy magazines published in 1953, and indispensable to students and collectors.

*Reprints:* Top priority recommendations to two of 1953's many excellent novels, both towering over most of the 1954 crop: Arthur C. Clarke's AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT (Permabooks, 25c) and Fritz Leiber's THE GREEN MILLENNIUM (Lion, 35c).

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service.

## *New Readers' Book Service*

Because bookstores are less common than they should be, and stores with a complete science-fantasy stock are even scarcer, you can now order direct from us any hard-cover book reviewed in this magazine during the past year, including this month's fine selections! (Sorry, but we cannot offer this service on paper-bound books.)

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*Very often your letters ask why Manly Wade Wellman doesn't publish a book of the adventures of the roving ballad-singer name of John, and point out that such a book would be a valuable contribution, not only to fantasy, but to American folklore. Well, the only reason that there isn't an entire book of John is that not quite enough of his strange experiences have been recorded as yet; but I can assure you that there are more on the way to round out a full-sized volume very soon — and the line of eager and percipient publishers will please form on the right. Meanwhile here is John again — artist, wanderer, sometimes a detective, sometimes a sort of magician, and always a friend — learning the secret of the gold mined by the Ancients in the southern mountains . . . and of what manner of thing the Ancients set to guard it.*

# *Shiver in the Pines*

*by* MANLY WADE WELLMAN

We sat along the edge of Mr. Hoje Cowand's porch, up the high hills of the Rebel Creek country. Mr. Hoje himself, and his neighbor Mr. Eddy Herron who was a widowman like Mr. Hoje, and Mr. Eddy's son Clay who was a long tall fellow like his daddy, and Mr. Hoje's pretty-cheeked daughter Sarah Ann, who was courting with Clay. And me. I'd stopped off to hand-help Mr. Hoje build him a new pole fence, and nothing would do him but I'd stay two-three days. Supper had been pork and fried apples and pone and snap beans. The sun made to set, and they all asked me to sing.

So I picked the silver strings on my guitar and began the old tuneful one:

*Choose your partner as you go,*
*Choose your partner as you go.*

"Yippeehoo!" hollered old Mr. Eddy. "You sure enough can play that, John! Come on, choose partners and dance!"

Up hopped Clay and Sarah Ann, on the level-stamped front yard, and I played it up loud and sang, and Mr. Eddy called figures for them to step to:

"Honor your partner! . . . Swing your partner! . . . Do-si-do! . . . Allemand right!" Till I got to one last chorus and I sang out loudly:



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*Fare thee well, my charming gal,*
*Fare thee well, I'm gone!*
*Fare thee well, my charming gal,*
*With golden slippers on!*

"Kiss your partner and turn her loose!" whooped out Mr. Eddy as I stopped. Clay kissed Sarah Ann the way you'd think it was his whole business in life, and Sarah Ann, up on her little toes, kissed him back.

"Won't be no better singing and dancing the day these young ones marry up," said Mr. Hoje. "And no fare thee wells then."

"And I purely wish I could buy you golden slippers, Sarah Ann," said Clay as the two sat down together again.

"Gold's where you find it," quoted Mr. Eddy from the Book. "Clay, you might ransack round them old lost mines the Ancients dug, that nobody knows about. John, you remember the song about them?"

I remembered, for Mr. Eddy and Mr. Hoje talked a right much about the Ancients and their mines. I sang it:

*Where were they, where were they,*
*On that gone and vanished day*
*When they shoveled for their treasure of gold?*
*In the pines, in the pines,*
*Where the sun never shines,*
*And I shiver when the wind blows cold. . . .*

As I stopped, a throat rasped, loud. "Odd," said somebody, walking into the yard, "to hear that song just now."

We didn't know the somebody. He was blocky-made, not young nor either old, with a store suit and a black hat, like a man running for district judge. His square face looked flat and white, like a face drawn on paper.

"Might I sit for a minute?" he asked, mannerly. "I've come a long, long way."

"Take the door-log, and welcome," Mr. Hoje bade him. "My name's Hoje Cowand, and this is my daughter Sarah Ann, and these are the Herrons, and this here's John, who's a-visiting me. Come a long way, you said? Where from, sir?"

"From going to and fro in the world," said the stranger, lifting the hat from his smoke-gray hair, "and from walking up and down in it."

Another quotation from the Book; and if you've read Job's first chapter, you know who's supposed to have said it. The man saw how we gopped, for he smiled as he sat down and stuck out his dusty shoes.

"My name's Reed Barnitt," he said. "Odd, to hear talk of the Ancients and their mines. For I've roved around after talk of them."

"Why," said Mr. Hoje, "folks say the Ancients came into these mountains before the settlers. Close to four hundred years back."

"That long, Mr. Hoje?" asked young Clay.

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"Well, a tree was cut that growed in the mouth of an Ancients' mine, near Horse Stomp," Mr. Hoje allowed. "Schooled folks counted the rings in the wood, and there was full three hundred. It was before the Yankee war they done that, so the tree seeded itself in the mine-hole four hundred years back, or near about."

"The time of the Spaniards," nodded Reed Barnitt. "Maybe about when de Soto and his Spanish soldiers crossed these mountains."

"I've heard tell the Ancients was here around that time," put in Mr. Eddy, "but I've likewise heard tell they wasn't Spanish folks, nor either Indians."

"Did they get what they sought?" wondered Reed Barnitt.

"My daddy went into that Horse Stomp heading once," said Mr. Eddy. "He said it run back about seven hundred foot as he stepped it, and a deep shaft went down at the end. Well, he figured no mortal soul would dig so far, saving he found what he was after." He had hold of Mr. Hoje's jug, and now he pushed it toward Mr. Barnitt. "Have a drink?"

"Thank you kindly, I don't use it. What did the Ancients want?"

"I've seen only one of their mines, over the ridge yonder," and Mr. Hoje nodded through the dusk. "Where they call it Black Pine Hollow —"

"Where the sun never shines," put in Mr. Barnitt, "and I shiver when the wind blows cold." His smile at me was tight.

"I was there three-four times when I was a chap, but not lately, for folks allows there's haunts there. I saw a right much quartz laying around, and I hear tell gold comes from quartz rock."

"Gold," nodded Reed Barnitt. He put his hand inside his coat.

"You folks are treating me clever," he said, "and I hope you let me make a gift. Miss Sarah Ann, I myself don't have use for these, so if you'd accept —"

What he held out was golden slippers, that shone in the down-going sun's last suspicions.

Gentlemen, you should have heard Sarah Ann cry out her pleasure, you should have seen the gold shine in her eyes. But she drew back the hand she put out.

"I couldn't," she said. "Wouldn't be fitting to."

"Then I'll give them to this young man." Reed Barnitt set the slippers in Clay's lap. "Young sir, I misdoubt if Miss Sarah Ann would refuse a gift at your hands."

The slippers had high heels and pointy toes, and they shone like glory. Clay smiled at Sarah Ann and gave them to her. To see her smile back, you'd think it was Clay, and not Reed Barnitt, had taken them from nowhere for her.

"I do thank you kindly," said Sarah Ann. She shucked off her scuffy old shoes, and the golden slippers fitted her like slippers made

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to the measure of her feet. "John," she said, "was just singing about things like this."

"Heard him as I came up trail from Rebel Creek," said Reed Barnitt. "And likewise heard him sing of the Ancients in Black Pine Hollow." His square face looked at us around. "Gentlemen," he said, "I wonder if there's heart in you all to go there with me."

We gopped again. Finally Clay said, "For gold?"

"For what else?" said Reed Barnitt. "Nobody's found it there, because nobody had the special way to look for it."

Nary one of us was really surprised to hear what the man said. There'd been such a story as long as anybody had lived around Rebel Creek. Mr. Hoje drank from the jug. Finally he said, "In what respect a special way, Mr. Barnitt?"

"I said I'd roved a far piece. I went to fetch a spell that would show the treasure. But I can't do it alone." Again the white face traveled its look over us. "It takes five folks — men, because a woman mustn't go into a mine."

We knew about that. If lady-folks go down a mine, there'll be something bad befall, maybe a miner killed.

"You've been kindly to me," said Reed Barnitt. "I feel like asking you, will you all come help me? Mr. Cowand, and Mr. Herron, and you his son, and you, John. Five we'd seek the treasure of theAncients and five ways we'd divide it."

Sarah Ann had her manners with her. "I'll just go do the dishes," she said to us. "No, Clay, don't come help. Stay and talk here."

Reed Barnitt watched her go into the house. She left the door open, and the shine from the hearth gave us red light after sundown.

"You're a lucky young rooster," Reed Barnitt said to Clay. "A fifth chunk of the Ancients' treasure would sure enough pleasure that girl."

"Mr. Barnitt, I'm with you," Clay told him quick.

"So am I," said Mr. Eddy, because his son had spoken.

"I don't lag back when others go forward," I added on.

"Count on me," finished Mr. Hoje for us. "That makes five, like you want it, sir. But you studied the thing out and got the spell. You should have more than a fifth of whatever we find."

But the white square face shook sideways. "No. Part of the business is that each of the five takes his equal part, of the doing and of the sharing. That's how it must be. Now — we begin."

"Right this instant?" asked Clay.

"Yes," said Reed Barnitt. "Stand round, you all."

He got up from the door-log and stepped into the yard, and the rest of us with him. "The first part of the spell," he said. "To learn if the Ancients truly left a treasure."

Where the hearth's red glimmer showed on the ground in front of

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the door, he knelt down. He picked up a stick. He marked in the dirt.

"Five-pointed star," he said. It was maybe four feet across. "Stand at the points, gentlemen. Yes, like that."

Rising, he took his place at the fifth point. He flung away the stick, and put a white hand into the side pocket of his coat. "Silence," he warned us, though he didn't need to.

He stooped and flung something down at the star's center. Maybe it was powder, though I'm not sure, for it broke out into fire quick, and shone like pure white heat yanked in a chunk from the heart of a furnace. I saw it shine sickly on the hairy faces of Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy, and Clay's young jaws and cheeks seemed dull and drawn. Reed Barnitt needed no special light to be pale.

He began to speak. "Moloch, Lucifer," he said in a voice like praying. "Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not, awake. The strong hero Holoba, the powerful Ischiros, the mighty Manus Erohye — show us the truth! Amen."

Again his hand in his pocket, and he brought out a slip of paper the size of a postcard, whiter than white in the glow. He handed it to Clay, who was nearest him. "Breathe on it," said Reed Barnitt, "and the others do likewise."

Clay breathed on it, and passed it to Mr. Hoje. Then it came to me, and to Mr. Eddy, and back to Reed Barnitt. He stooped again, and held it above that sick-white heat. Back he jumped, quick, and yelled out loud, "Earth on the fire! Smother it before we lose the true word!"

Clay and his father flung on dirt. Mr. Hoje and Reed Burnitt walked side by side to the porch, whispering together. Then Mr. Hoje called in to Sarah Ann, "Fetch out the lamp, honey."

She did so. We gathered round to look at the paper. Writing was on it, spidery-looking and rough, the way you'd think it was written in mud instead of ink. Reed Barnitt gave it to Sarah Ann.

"Your heart is good," he said. "Read out what it says for us."

She held the lamp in one hand, the paper in the other.

"Do right, and prosper," she read, soft and shaky, "and what you seek is yours. Great treasure. Obey orders. To open the way, burn the light —"

"We put out the light," said Clay, but Reed Barnitt waved him quiet.

"Turn the paper over, Miss Sarah Ann," said Reed Barnitt. "Looks like more to read on the other side."

She looked at more muddy-looking scrawl on the back. She went on:

"Aram Harnam has the light. Buy it from him, but don't tell him why. He is wicked. Pay what he asks. The power is dear and scarce."

She looked up. "That's all it

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says," she told us, and gave the paper back to Reed Barnitt.

We all sat down, the lamp on the porch floor among us. "Anybody know that man, what's-his-name?" asked Reed Barnitt.

"Yes," answered Mr. Hoje. "We know Aram Harnam."

At least, I'd heard what others along Rebel Creek said about Aram Harnam, and it wasn't good.

Seems he'd gone to a college to be a preacher. But that college sent him to be tried, with a sermon to some folks in another county. His teachers went to hear. When he had done, as I heard it told, those teachers told Aram Harnam that from what he'd said under name of a sermon they wanted him to pack his things and leave the college before ever another sun rose.

So he came back to Rebel Creek. One night he went up on a bald hill most folks stayed away from, and put his hand on his head and said that all beneath his hand could be Satan's property. After that, he did witch-doctoring. Nobody liked him but ary man, woman and child in the Rebel Creek county feared him.

"I take it that Aram Harnam's a bad man," Reed Barnitt suggested.

"You take it right, sir," allowed Mr. Eddy. "So does whoever wrote on that paper."

"Wrote on the paper?" Reed Barnitt said after him, and held it out to the light. It was white and empty; so was the other side when he turned that up.

"The writing's been taken back," he said, nodding his pale face above it. "But we all remember what it said. We must buy the light, and not let Aram Harnam know why we want it."

"When do we go see him?" asked Mr. Hoje.

"Why not now?" said Reed Barnitt, but Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy spoke against that. Neither of them wanted to be trucking round Aram Harnam's place in the dark of night. We made it up to meet tomorrow morning for breakfast at Mr. Eddy's, then go.

Mr. Eddy and Clay left. Mr. Hoje and Sarah Ann made up pallets for Reed Barnitt and me just inside the front door. Reed Barnitt slept right off quick, but I lay awake a good spell. There was a sight of hoot owls hooting in the trees round the cabin, and a sight of thoughts in my head.

Way I've told it so far, you might wonder why we came in so quick on Reed Barnitt's spell and scheme. Lying there, I was wondering the same thing. It came to mind that Clay had first said he'd join. That was for Sarah Ann, and Clay without land or money, wanting to marry her and have enough to make her happy. After Clay spoke, Mr. Eddy and Mr. Hoje felt bound to do the same, for with them the kingdom and the power and the glory tied up to their young ones,

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and they wanted to see them wed and happy. Mr. Hoje special. He worked hard on a little place, with corn patches on terraces up slope you had to hang on with one hand while you chopped weeds with the other, and just one cow and two hogs in his pens.

I reckoned it was hope, more than belief, that caused them to say yes to Reed Barnitt. And me — well, I'd gone a many miles and seen a right much more things than any of my friends, and some of the things not what you'd call everyday things. I reckon I was hoping, too, for a good piece of luck for Clay and Sarah Ann. Never having had anything myself, or expecting to, I could anyhow see how he and she wanted something. So why not help out? Maybe, one or two things I'd watched happen, I could know to help out more than either of their fathers.

Figuring like that, I slept at last, and at the dawn gray we up to meet at Mr. Eddy's.

My first look at Aram Harnam, sitting in front of his low-built little shanty, I reckoned I'd never seen a hairier man, and mighty few hairier creatures. He had a juniper-bark basket betwixt his patched knees, and he was picking over a mess of narrow-leafed plants in it. His hands crawled in the basket like black-furred spiders. Out between his shaggy hair and his shaggy beard looked only his bright eyes and his thin brown nose, and if he smiled or frowned at us, none could say. He spoke up with a boom, and I recollected how once he'd studied to preach.

"Hoje Cowand," he said, "you're welcome, and your friends, too. I knew you all was coming."

"Who done told you that?" asked Mr. Hoje.

"Little bird done told me," said Aram Harnam. "Little black bird with green eyes, that tells me a many things."

It minded me of the Ugly Bird, that once I killed and freed a whole district of folks from the scare of it.

"Maybe your little bird told you what we want," said Mr. Eddy, standing close to Clay, but Aram Harnam shook his head.

"No sir, didn't say that." He set down the basket. "I'm a-waiting to hear."

Mr. Hoje introduced Reed Barnitt and me, and neither of us nor yet Aram Harnam made offer to shake hands.

"It's a light we want of you, Aram Harnam," said Mr. Hoje then. "A special kind of light."

"Oh." Aram Harnam leaned back against the logs of his shanty. "The light that shows you what you'd miss else? I can fix you such a light."

"How much?" asked Clay.

Aram Harnam's furry hand fiddled in his beard. "It's a scarce thing, that light. Cost you five hundred dollars."

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"Five hundred dollars!" whooped out Mr. Eddy.

The eyes among all Aram Harnam's hair came to me. "Hear that echo, son?" he asked me. "Right clear today — these hills and mountains sure enough give you back echoes." Then, to Mr. Eddy. "Yes, sir. Five hundred dollars."

Mr. Hoje gulped. "We ain't got that kind of money."

"Got to have that kind of money for that kind of light," said Aram Harnam.

"Step aside with me, gentlemen," said Reed Barnitt, and Aram Harnam sat and watched us pull back a dozen or twenty steps to talk with our heads together.

"He knows something," Reed Barnitt whispered, "but not everything, or I judge he'd put his price higher still. Anyway, our spell last night told us there's treasure, and we need the light to find it."

"I ain't got but forty dollars," said Mr. Eddy. "Anybody else got enough to put with my forty dollars to make five hundred?"

"Twenty's all I have," Reed Barnitt told us, and breathed long and worried. "That's sixty so far. John?"

"Maybe the change in my pockets would add up to a dollar," I said. "I'm not right sure."

Aram Harnam laughed, or coughed, one. "You all make a big thing out of five hundred dollars," he called to us.

Mr. Hoje faced around and walked back toward him. "We don't have it."

"Cash," said Aram Harnam after him. "I might credit you, Hoje Cowand."

"Five hundred dollars' worth?" asked Mr. Hoje. "What on?"

"We-ell . . ." The word came slow out of the hair and whiskers. "You've got a piece of land, and a house, and a cow and a pig or two . . ."

"I can't give you those," Mr. Hoje put in.

"You could put them up. And Mr. Eddy could put up his place, too."

"The two places are worth plenty more than five hundred dollars," Mr. Eddy started to argue.

"Not on the tax bills, the way I hear from my little green-eyed black bird."

Reed Barnitt beckoned us round him again. "Isn't there any way to raise the money?" he whispered. "We're just before finding a fortune."

Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy shook their heads.

"Gentlemen, we've as good as got that Ancients' treasure," Reed Barnitt said, and rummaged money from his pocket — a wadded ten, a five and some ones. "I'll risk my last cent, and take it back from off the top of whatever find. You others can do the same."

"Wait," said Mr. Hoje.

He put his arm around Mr.

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Eddy's neck, and the two of them mumbled together a while, and we others watched. Then they turned, both of them, and went back to Aram Harnam.

"We'd want a guarantee," said Mr. Hoje.

"Guarantee?" repeated Aram Harnam. "Oh, I'll guarantee the light. Put it in writing that it'll show you what you seek."

"Draw us up some loan papers," said Mr. Eddy. "Two hundred and fifty dollars credit to each of us, against our places, and a guarantee the light will work, and sixty days of time."

Mr. Eddy spoke sharp and deeply. Aram Harnam looked at him, then went into the shanty. He brought out a tablet of paper and an ink bottle and an old stump of a pen. He wrote two pages, and when Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy read them over they signed their names.

Then Aram Harnam bade us wait. He carried the papers back inside. What he did in there took time, and I watched part of it through the open door. He mixed stuff in a pot — I thought I smelled burning sulphur, and once something sweet and spicy, like what incense must smell like. There was other stuff. He heated it so it smoked, then worked it with those furry hands. After while he fetched out what he'd made. It was a big rough candle, as big around as your wrist and as long as your arm to the elbow. Its wick looked like gray yarn, and the candle wax was dirty black.

"Light it at midnight," he said, "and carry it forward. It'll go out at the place where you'll find your wish. Understand?"

We said we understood.

"Then good day to you all," said Aram Harnam.

Nobody felt the need of sleep that night. At eleven o'clock by Mr. Hoje's big silver turnip watch, we started out to cross the ridge to Black Pine Hollow. Clay went first, with a lantern. Reed Barnitt followed, with the candle. Then me, with my guitar slung on my back because I had a notion to carry it along, and a grubbing hoe in my hand. Then Mr. Hoje with a spade, and Mr. Eddy last of all with a crowbar. Sarah Ann watched us from the door, until we got out of her sight.

Not much of a trail led to Black Pine Hollow, for folks don't go there much. Last night's hoot owls were at it again, and once or twice we heard rattlings to right and left, like things keeping pace with us among the bushes. Down into the hollow we went, while a breeze blew down on us, chill for that time of year. I thought, but didn't sing out loud:

*In the pines, in the pines,*
*Where the sun never shines,*
*And I shiver when the wind blows cold . . .*

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"Where's this mine?" asked Reed Barnitt.

"I can find it better than Clay," called Mr. Hoje. He pushed ahead and took the lantern. The light showed duller and duller, the deeper we went into the hollow; it showed a sort of dim brown, the way you'd think that moonless night was trying to smother it. Around us crowded the black pines the hollow was named after. For my own comfort I reached back and tweaked a silver guitar-string, and it rang so loud we all jumped.

"Now," said Mr. Hoje, after a long, long while, "I think this must be it."

He turned off amor a thick bunch of the blackest-looking pines, and held the lantern high. Hidden there behind the trees rose a rock face like a wall, and in the rock was a hole the size of a door, but uneven. Vines hung down around it, but they looked dead and burnt out. As we stood still and looked, there was a little timid foot-patter inside.

"Let's pray that's no rat," said Clay. "Rats in mines are plumb bad luck."

"Shoo," said his daddy, "let's hope it's nothing worse than just a rat."

Reed Barnitt shoved forward. "I'm going in," he said through his teeth, "and I sure enough don't want to go in alone."

We went in together. Gentlemen, it was so black in that mine, you'd think a hunk of coal would show white. Maybe the lantern was smoking; it made just a pool of dim glow for us. Reed Barnitt struck a match on the seat of his pants and set it to the yarny wick of that five hundred dollar candle. It blazed up clean and strong, like the light Reed Barnitt had made in the middle of the star when it cast the spell. We saw where we were.

Seemed as if once there'd been a long hallway cut in the brown rock, but rocks had fallen down. They lay one on top of the other before us, shutting us away from the hall, so that we stood in a little space not much bigger than Mr. Hoje's front room. To either side the walls were of brown stone, marked by cutting tools — those Ancients had made their way through solid rock — and underfoot were pebbles. Some were quartz, like Mr. Hoje had said. Everything was quiet as the inside of a coffin the night before judgment.

"The flame's pointing," Reed Barnitt called to us. It did point, like a burning finger, straight into the place. He stepped toward those piled rocks, that made something like steps to go up, and we moved with him. I don't think anybody wanted to go over the rocks and beyond. The blackness there made you feel that not only nobody had ever been in there, but likewise nobody could ever go; the blackness would shove him back like a hand.

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I moved behind Reed Barnitt with the others. The light of the candle shone past his blocky body and wide hat, making him look like something cut out of black cloth. Two-three steps, and he stopped, so quick we almost bumped him. "The light flutters," he said.

It did flutter, and it didn't point to the piled rocks, but to the wall at their right. When Reed Barnitt made a pace that way, it winked out. We all stood close together in the dim lantern light.

Reed Barnitt put his hand on the rock wall. It showed ghost white on the brown. His finger crawled along a seamy crack.

"Dig there," he said to us.

By what light the lantern showed, I shoved the pick end of the grubbing hoe into the crack and gouged. Seemed to me the whole wall fought me, but I heaved hard and the crack widened. It made a heavy spiteful noise somewhere. Mr. Eddy drove in the point of his bar and pulled down.

"Come help me, Clay," he called. "Put your man on this."

The two pulled down with their long tall bodies, then together they pushed up. My heart jumped inside me, for a piece of rock the size of a table top was moving. I shoved on the hoe handle. Reed Barnitt grabbed the free edge of the moving piece, and we laid into it — then jumped back just in time.

The big loose chunk dropped like the lid of a box. Underneath was dark dirt. Mr. Eddy drove the bar point into it.

"Light that candle thing again," he asked Reed Barnitt.

Reed Barnitt struck another match and tried. "Won't light," he said. "We've got our hand right on the treasure."

I reckon that's the moment we all believed we had it. So far we'd worried and bothered, but now we stopped, and just worked. Clay took the spade from Mr. Hoje, and I swung my hoe. He scooped out the dirt I loosened. We breathed hard, watching or working. Suddenly:

"John," said Clay, "didn't I hear that hoe-blade hit metal?"

I slammed it into the dirt again, hard as I could. Clay scooped out a big spadeful. Bright yellow glimmered up out of the dark dirt. Clay grabbed into it, and so did his daddy. I had my mouth open to yell, but Reed Barnitt yelled first.

"God in the bushes! Look up there!"

We looked. Reed Barnitt had turned away from our work, and he pointed up those step-piled rocks. On the top rock of them stood something against the choking blackness.

It stood up the height of a man, that thing, but you couldn't make sure of its shape. Because it was strung and swaddled over with webby rags. They stirred and fluttered around it like gray smoke.

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And it had a hand, and the hand held a skull, with white grinning teeth and eyes that shone.

"It's an Ancient!" Reed Barnitt yelled, and the thing growled, deep and hungry and ugly.

Clay dropped his spade. I heard the clink and jangle of metal pieces on the floor pebbles. He gave back, and Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy gave back with him. I stood where I was, putting down my hoe. Reed Barnitt was the only one that moved forward.

"Stay away from us," he sort of breathed out at the ragged-gray thing.

It just pushed out the skull at him, and the skull's eye-lights blinked and glared. Reed Barnitt backed up.

"Let's get out of here," he choked, "before that Ancient —"

He didn't know we'd found the treasure, his eyes had been on whatever the thing was. He was for running, but I wasn't.

In my mind I saw the peculiar things I'd faced before this. The Ugly Bird . . . One Other . . . Mr. Loden who might have lived three hundred years but for me . . . Forney Meechum whose dead ghost had fled from me. I'd even seen the Behinder that nobody's ever reckoned to see, and I'd come back to tell of it. I wouldn't run from that gray-raggedy thing that held a skull like a lantern.

I shrugged my guitar in front of me. My left hand grabbed its neck and my right spread on the silver strings, the silver that's sure sudden death to witch-stuff. I dragged a chord of music from them, and it echoed in there like a whole houseful of guitar-men helping me. And I thought the thing up there above shuddered, and the skull it held wabbled from side to side, trying maybe to say no to me.

"You don't like my music?" I said to it, and swept out another chord and got my foot on the bottom step-stone.

"John!" came Reed Barnitt's sick voice. "Take care —"

"Let that thing take care!" I told him and moved up on the rocks.

The gray thing flung the skull at me. I dodged, and felt the wind of the skull as it sailed grinning past, and I heard it smash like a bottle on the floor behind me. For a moment that flinging hand stuck out of the gray rags.

I knew whose hand it was, black-furry like a spider.

"Aram Harnam!" I yelled out, and let my guitar fall to hang by its string, and I charged up those stairs of stones.

Reed Barnitt was after me as I got to the top.

"It's a put-up show!" I was shouting, and grabbed my hands full of rags. Reed Barnitt clamped onto my arm and flung me down the step-stones so I almost fell flat on the floor. But rags had torn away in my grip, and you could see Aram Harnam's face, all a thicket

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of hair and beard, with hooked nose and shining eyes.

"What's up?" hooted out Mr. Eddy.

"Aram Harnam's up!" I yelled to him and the others. "Sold us that candle-thing, then came here to scare us out!" I pointed. "And Reed Barnitt's in it with him!"

Reed Barnitt, on the top stone beside Aram Harnam, turned around, his eyes big in his white face. I got my feet under me to charge back up at those two.

But then I stopped, the way you'd think roots had sprung from my toes into the rock. There were three up there, not two.

That third one looked at first glimpse like a big, big man wearing a fur coat; until you saw the fur was on his skin, with warty muscles bunching through. His head was more like a frog's than anything else, wide in the mouth and big in the eye and no nose. He spread his arms and put them quiet-like round the shoulders of Reed Barnitt and Aram Harnam, and took hold with his hands that had both webs and claws.

The two men he touched screamed out like animals in a snap-trap. I sort of reckon they tried to pull free, but those two big shaggy arms just hugged them close and hiked them off their feet. And what had come to fetch them, it fetched them away, all in a blink of time, back into that darkness no sensible soul would dare.

That's when we four others up and ran like rabbits, dropping the lantern.

We got back to Mr. Hoje's, and lighted a lamp there, and looked at those two handfuls of metal pieces Clay and Mr. Eddy had grabbed and never turned loose.

"I reckon they're money," said Mr. Hoje, "but I never seen the like."

None of us had. They weren't even round. Just limpy-edged and flattened out. You could figure how they'd been made, a lump of soft gold put between two jaws of a die and stamped out. The smallest was bigger and thicker than a four-bit piece. They had figures, like men with horned heads and snaky tails, and there were what might be letters or numbers, but nothing any of us could name in any language we'd ever heard tell of.

We put all those coins into an old salt-bag, and sat up the rest of the night, not talking much but pure down glad of each other's company. We had breakfast together, cooked by Sarah Ann, who had the good sense not to question. And after that, came up a young man who was sheriff's deputy.

"Gentlemen," he said to us, "has ary one of you seen a fellow with a white face and a broad build?"

"What's up with such a one?" asked Mr. Hoje.

"Why, Mr. Hoje," said the sheriff's deputy, "they want him bad

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at the state prison. He was a show-fellow, doing play-magic tricks, but he took to swindling folks and got in jail and then got out again, and the law's after him."

"We've seen such a man," allowed Mr. Eddy, "but he's gone from here now."

When we were left alone again, we told each other we could see how it was. Reed Barnitt did his false magic tricks, like setting the light on the star and making words show on the white paper by heating it. And he'd planned it with Aram Harnam to furnish us that black candle, to get hold of the property of Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy — scaring them afterward, so bad they'd never dare look again, and forfeit their home places.

Only: There *was* treasure there, the way those two swindlers never guessed. And there was something left to watch and see it wasn't robbed away.

I don't call to mind which of us said that all we could do was take back the gold pieces, because such things could never do anybody good. We went back that noon to Black Pine Hollow, where the sun sure enough didn't shine. We shivered without ary wind blowing.

Inside the mine-mouth, we picked up the lantern and lighted it. Clay had the nerve to pick up the broken skull Aram Harnam had flung, and we saw why the eyes had shone — pieces of tin in them. We found our spade and hoe. Into the hole we flung the gold pieces, on top of what seemed a heap more lying there. Then we put back the dirt, tamped it down hard, and we all heaved and sweated till we put the piece of rock in place again.

"There, the Ancients got their treasure back," said Mr. Hoje, breathing hard.

Then, noise up on those stepstones. I held up the lantern.

Huddled and bent they stood up there, Reed Barnitt and Aram Harnam.

They sort of leaned together, like tired horses in plow harness, not quite touching shoulders. Their hands — Reed Barnitt's white ones, Aram Harnam's shaggy ones — hung with the fingers bent and limp. They looked down at us with tired eyes and mouths drooped open, the way you'd think they had some hope about us, but not much.

"Look," said Clay, just behind my neck. "We gave back the gold. They're giving back those two that they dragged away last night."

But they looked as if they'd been gone more than a night.

The hair on Reed Barnitt's hatless head was as white as his face. And Aram Harnam's beard, and the fur on his hands — black no more, but a dirty, steamy gray. Maybe it had changed from fear, the way folks say can happen. Or maybe there'd been *time* for it to change, where they were.

"Go fetch them, John," Mr. Hoje asked me. "And we'll get a

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doctor for them when we get them to my house."

I started up over the stones with the lantern.

Their eyes picked up the lantern light and shone green, like the eyes of dogs. One of them, I don't know which, made a little whimpering cry with no words in it. They ran from me into the dark, and I saw their backs, bent more than I'd thought possible.

I ran up to the top stone, holding out the lantern.

As I watched they sort of fell forward and ran on hands and feet. Like animals. Not quite sure of how to run that way on all fours; but something told me, mighty positive, that they'd learn better as time went by. I backed down again, without watching any more.

"They won't come out," I said.

Mr. Hoje spit on the pebbles. "From what I saw, maybe it's just as well. They can live in there with the Ancients."

"Live?" repeated Clay. "The Ancients are dead. Way I figure, what's in there isn't Ancients — just something Ancients left behind. I don't want any part of it."

From Black Pine Hollow we went to Aram Harnam's empty shanty and there we found the papers he'd tricked Mr. Hoje and Mr. Eddy into signing, and we burned them up. On the way back, the two old men made it up between themselves to spare Clay and Sarah Ann a few acres from both places. As to the cabin, neighbors would be proud to help build it.

"One thing wonders me," said Clay. "John, you didn't have any notion night before last of singing about the girl with golden slippers?"

"Not till I struck the strings and piped up," I told him.

"Then how did Reed Barnitt just happen to take them from under his coat for Sarah Ann?" Clay asked us. "Stage-show magician or not, how did he just happen to do that?"

None of us could guess.

But Sarah Ann kept the golden slippers, and nobody could see any reason why not. She wore them to marry up with Clay, and danced in them while I played song after song — "Pretty Fair Maid," and "Willie From the Western States," and "I Dreamed Last Night of My True Love, All In My Arms I Had Her." Preacher Miller said the service, what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. I kissed the pretty-cheeked bride, and so did many a kind friend, but the only man of us she kissed back was long tall Clay Herron.

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# *Botany Bay*

*by* P. M. HUBBARD

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE EVENINGS YOU get in England around midsummer, that seem to go on indefinitely. I could build up a nice bit of atmosphere about that evening, but it wouldn't be true. If there was an atmosphere, I didn't feel it; and on the facts, even as presented, I don't see why there should have been. And the petrol-station was a perfectly ordinary one, and the man on duty, to all appearances, a perfectly ordinary man.

The man filled her up, speaking with a pleasant richness in what I took to be the local voice. Then he went inside for change, and I got out and walked around a bit to stretch my legs. The road followed the valley here, with hills — I suppose chalk downs — rising sharply on the far side. It was really starting to get dark at last, and the narrow strip of tarmac reflected like water the tremendous sultry glow that lay across the tops of the hills. There were a few stars showing, and one in particular, a steady orange-gold, over the high skyline right opposite the pumps.

I fetched up beside the door of the garage, looking at the collection of spares and accessories they always put in the window at these places. The man must have thought I was still in the car. He came straight out of the door, leaving me behind him, and walked towards the pumps. He had the money in his hand. Then he stopped, just as I was going to speak to him, and uttered a sound which I could hardly believe I'd heard, only my stomach was still sickened at it. When I pulled myself together, I decided he was ill, and went to him. He was still standing there, with the line of pumps between him and the car, gazing up at the sky, where the orange-yellow star, clearer now, gazed back.



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I said, "Are you all right?" I didn't touch him or anything. He was perfectly steady on his feet, just standing there, and I still wasn't sure. Then I came abreast of him and saw his face. I haven't described his appearance before, because he wasn't the sort of man you find it necessary to describe — just an ordinary man, in overalls, a bit on the small side and quiet-spoken, but very ordinary. Now he had a look on his face that needs describing, but isn't easy to describe — not adequately. It was a look of longing, a sort of shocking hunger, but so overlaid with hopelessness that the impression was one of complete passivity. He didn't move because there was nothing he could do. The sound he had uttered had been squeezed out of him; it was quite involuntary. He was looking at the star.

I said, "Are you all right?" again. It was an idiotic question to ask a man with that look on his face, but it was the sort of thing one does say. He heard me the second time. He turned and held out the money to me, but in a tentative sort of way, and not quite within my reach, as though he couldn't get me properly focussed. I moved up and took it from him. That seemed to rouse him. He looked at me, rearranging his disintegrated features. "I thought you were in the car," he said. The voice, with its soft country burr, was quite unchanged.

It seemed to be dark now all at once. The orange star glowed in the sky, but he did not look at it. It didn't look right to me, but I don't notice that sort of thing much, and I think now it was probably quite normal. There again, there was no reason, even on the facts, why it should have been anything else.

I said, "That star —" but he cut me very short. "That's not a star, sir," he said. "More what you'd call a planet." He spoke exactly as a countryman speaks to a townsman, putting him right, but no disrespect intended. He was in every way perfectly ordinary again.

"All right," I said, "a planet it is. But look, chum. I don't want to interfere, and I'm sorry if you didn't know I was there. But I heard you and saw your face just now, and there's something very wrong. If there's anything I can do —"

He turned his back while I was still speaking and started walking towards the garage. He said, "I wonder why the hell They let me remember."

He went inside and I followed him. In the last glimmer of daylight we groped our way into the little boarded box of an office and sat down on hard chairs. The air smelt of petrol and oiled metal. I could see the outline of a cash-register and above it the stolid, frowning profile against the luminous window. "I didn't ought to remember, not by rights," he said. "They said —" He caught his breath, and I felt sick at the stomach again. "They

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said —" this time the word was harsh with a sort of incredulous defiance — "They said we'd remember nothing that was any good to us — just enough to keep us unhappy. They must have got the mixture wrong." He thought for a bit. "A couple of hundred of us there must have been, my time. Too many to handle properly, perhaps. Used to be forty or fifty in a batch, generally, but They had been having a lot of trouble. Don't all get there, of course. Even They don't know everything, and there's a lot of wastage. What happens to the ones that miss nobody knows, but They wouldn't care, so long as they get us off. Still, there must be a lot of us about, remembering enough to keep us unhappy. It's nicely done, really. You've got to hand it to them. They are clever all right."

He chuckled, a soft country chuckle, and then caught his breath again, so that I felt my heart thud twice in the sudden, hollow silence.

The window-frame lit up silver with the lights of an on-coming car. I got up, clutching with both hands at the solid reality of a country garage. Somebody sounded a horn outside, and he said, "I'll have to ask you to move your car, sir. You're blocking the pumps."

"I will," I said. I got in and started her up. Then, seeing no reason to do anything else, I drove on.

It was nearly a year before I went there again. I had no need to stop this time, and did not mean to. Nevertheless, I found I had been hoping to see him outside by the pumps; and when I did not, I hesitated on the throttle, and then stopped the car and walked back.

I didn't know the man who came out. He was a lot older, probably the boss. I suddenly found myself in a difficulty. I said, "Oh — I was hoping to see the chap who was here."

He looked at me a bit sharp. "Newman, you mean?" he said.

"I don't know his name. About a year ago. A smallish chap, fair."

"That's right, Newman. What d'you want him for? Any sort of trouble?" He seemed eager.

"No," I said, "no trouble. Isn't he here?"

"He went," he said. "Walked out on me. Must be nearly a year ago now. Never heard a word from him, nor did anyone else. Left everything in order, I must say. But when you asked for him, I wondered."

I said, "It doesn't matter." I turned and walked back to the car, feeling his eyes on my back the whole way. Now, of course, I shall never know. Only I did not imagine it. I can see him and hear him much too clearly for that, railing in his soft country voice against some monstrous celestial tyranny I could not understand.

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*Bryce Walton began his writing by covering the Iwo Jima and Okinawa campaigns as a combat correspondent for* Leatherneck. *In the decade and more since then he has written two novels (an s.f. juvenile and a crime book), close to a hundred scripts for* CAPTAIN VIDEO *and other TV shows, a series of articles on American history for British readers, and innumerable stories and novelets for just about every pulp magazine in existence, western, detective, adventure, and science fiction. His first story in F&SF is a brilliantly vivid nightmare of If-This-Goes-On . . . a flashing glimpse of the future in which the Psych boys think they have found the answer (cool, man!) to our heavily publicized problems of juvenile aberration.*

# The Midway

*by* BRYCE WALTON

SOON AS HERM LATHROP SAW THE Whirbug drop past his window, he ran to the secret compartment behind the desk of his room and dragged out the Black Raiders' hidden phone. He listened to see whether or not his old man might be spying on him, tapping the phone on the sly, then he waited for Ringo's plug-in.

"You ready, Herm?"

"Ready, Ringo. Got to get some fun money first from the old man, and I'll be right out!"

"Then we'll get release," Ringo said from the Whirbug hotrod outside. "This time I'm hunting me down a redhead!"

Herm wiped at the nervousness coating his face and hardening his thin lips. "I'll go for anything tonight! It's been a week since I had a girlie."

"A week for me too, a week too long for Ringo. So let's move, Herm!"

Herm made the salute of the Black Raiders and said with a hollow haunt in his throat, Ho! Hoooo! Black Raiderrrrrrr!"

"Ho! Hoooo! Black Raiderrrrrr!" Ringo answered.

Herm slipped down the stairs with the weight of his Old Man's total lack of feeling, sympathy or understanding on his lungs, and the Old Man's tired marshmallow face in his mind's gray space. He spied carefully across the living room.

The Old Man sagged snoring be-



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fore the TV screen, dead inside as usual, gone with the life-killing work-week, so that he'd be snoring the weekend away like in a gray dream.

Herm slipped some credit paper from the Old Man's wallet, replaced the wallet and crammed the credits into his skin-tight blue jeans. Then he leaned close to the bald head and blasted it right off the Old Man's eardrum. "Ho! Hoooo! Black Raid-errrrrr!"

Old Man Lathrop cried out as though shot. He leaned far away from his only offspring and almost fell off the chair on the other side. Adult squareheads were either unconscious, Herm thought, or with eyes open looking dead from slaving too long in the work groove. Master craftsman Lathrop who geared himself to eight hours a day in a factory turning out boxes for the storing of cereal to make kids feel like supermen. You couldn't even feel sorry for the Old Man who had forgot what it was to spit in the face of the world.

Herm doubled over laughing. Old Man Lathrop's tired face seemed to be looking into a wavering mirror of doubt and doom. "Youth's impunity!" he almost screamed. "I'd kick your heels up your back like window shades if I didn't know I ought to give you more love and affection! What's the idea, Herm?"

Herm couldn't stop laughing. His Old Man was the world's worst square.

"What do you want, Herm? Tell me! Your Mother needs help in the basement!"

His Mother was always on the clean kick, wrapping herself up in the new thermodynamatrix washing machine, probably trying to forget that she wasn't really living any more. "I've got to have fun at the Midway again, Poppa."

"You been to the Midway once this week!"

"Feel dangerous suppressed impulses digging my insides," Herm said, doing a little dance around his Old Man. "Got to release frenzied adolescent drives, Poppa. Got to get myself a woman."

"You had yourself a woman last week!" the Old Man yelled. "What is this — release from adolescent frustration, or addiction to sexy dope?"

"Give me some credits, Poppa. You think the world gives releasing pleasure for nothing?"

"You don't have any allowance left!" A line of white moved around the Old Man's tired lips. "Listen: you aren't going any place but into the basement to help your mother. You're not getting another credit from me until next week!"

"You want I should turn into a delinquent kid because I don't get love?" Herm yelled, even louder than his Old Man.

His Old Man leaned over and put his hand over his eyes. He whispered. "You get a woman once a week, son. That's what it says on your release

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chart. It's plenty. It's plenty for any kid, especially a kid who doesn't even study his lessons and won't help his mother. You'll never graduate. You'll never follow in my footsteps making boxes to help keep the complex consumer-productive system running smoothly —"

You can't trust a moron, Herm thought. He'll get you in a hassle. The Old Man really thought he was important, a soldier in the great production army, worthy of the Medal of Honor, just because he helped put pasteboard boxes together all day. The creeping fear came back to Herm then as the muddy flat future opened before him. He had to get out, had to get to the fun of the Midway!

"Ho! Hoooo! Black Raiderrrrrr!" Herm screamed, and his face was getting red. "I'm going to the Midway, Poppa! Give me pleasure paper. If you don't you may get a black mark when the Social Worker comes around from the school wanting to know if I'm getting enough fatherly affection!"

The Old Man's hand was shaking as he got the credit papers from his wallet and threw them into Herm's face. Herm grabbed the credits out of the air like in a magic act and danced backward out the door.

He ran laughing out into the crazy starlight and into the Whirbug beside the fatso Raider, Ringo Reese. The fat boy jiggled all over the seat killing himself with the expected joy of release at the Midway.

"Ho! Hoooo! Black Raider Fatso!" Herm said and hit Ringo on the slab of a shoulder. "It's high release time, so let's split the sky open!"

"Herm, you got plenty of credit moneys?"

"Loaded, Fatso. Loaded for love!"

The thought of the Midway, the plunging into high skies of night, the promise of sound and the screams of the women . . . it always seemed to push those indefinable fears of the future and its meaninglessness out of Herm, those frights that came from nowhere to blow empty spaces inside him.

Fatso Ringo started killing himself all over again with sounding excited, and the Whirbug shot straight up 5,000 feet and was soon hitting high at 1500 miles an hour for Midway love of living, streaming fiery lust all over the skyway, and making like a moon rocket racking at the stars.

"Ho! Hoooo! Black Raiderrrrrr!" Herm and Ringo yelled in towering togetherness. And to avoid disaster from the Whirbug's howling plunge for Midway fun, a passenger rocket plunged itself desperately 500 miles off course.

Below them, the Midway whirled spinning, making like a big neon top twisting, all fiery color for a mile along the lakeshore.

"We're going to get release huh?" Herm said.

"Release for us," Ringo yelled.

"So school won't be a headache."

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"And home won't be a headache."

"And we can face the responsible future like it said in the adolescent psych book."

"Right!" Ringo yelled. "We got to get quick release from adolescent tensions."

Looking down through the trickling beads that bled from neon, Herm's eyes sailed the glaring wonders of escape.

"Maybe adult squareheads aren't so wrong," Ringo said as he wavered the Whirbug all over, making for a parking slot, and the fun-ice sparkling below whirred up to greet them. "They threw this pleasure park up here just for us love-starved, excitement-crazy kids!"

"They had nothing to do with it from beginning to the end!" Herm said. "Not the adults, they didn't. Not the parents anyway." He found himself again inanely looking for the spot in his life when he stopped whistling and started feeling a serious depth in every little thing. Adolescence was sure a bad time, like the books said, all full of danger. "It was the psych boys that did it. The learning mill figured we need release from frustrated adolescent drives!"

Ringo laughed. "We do, we do need it, Herm!"

Sometime, Herm thought, Fatso would laugh his lonely insides right out of his basketball body. "They got the Midway set up for us, Fatso. Now we won't lounge and loaf all full of suppressed sin on the street corners."

"So, Herm, maybe we ought to be thankful."

"Not to the parent squareheads. Maybe not to anybody. Something's wrong somewhere, Ringo. Adults never get nothing but TV eyestrain at home, and moronitis from living in the work groove. What are we getting healthy release for, Ringo — so we can make pasteboard boxes all day and be retired with empty heads after twenty years?"

"You're too serious," Ringo said. He wasn't laughing.

"Then after that you drop dead."

"Anyway, I sure need a woman," Ringo said. "Must be they gave me somebody else's release chart by mistake. I figure mine was aimed for some other stoop, some sick kid with pernicious anemia."

"Let's drop down there, Fatso. I can't suppress my dangerous impulses much longer!"

The Whirbug clicked like a cog in its slot and Herm and Ringo raced down the steps toward the Midway all reflecting flashing colors like living neon. They shot past the lesser pleasures, strictly for puberty pixies: the fun rooms, hate-expressing rooms where you could smash images of your old man and old lady, the Superman Tunnels, the Spaceman's Realm, the horror shows, the Kill Alleys, the Hunting Houses and Chase Lounges and the psychodramas and the rest of it. They headed past the Barkers dressed in blue jeans for Girlie Land.

"Come on in, you hepkids," the

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Barkers slapped their jeans and yelled wildly, all hyped up in the pay of the state and eager to stay in their easy cool income racket. "Get release and relax your backs. Clear your brain for the scholastic strain, and rub out that growing pain!"

Herm sneered up at the Barker. "What a lousy way to make a living," he said, and then he dragged at Ringo, pulling him unresistingly and faster after him toward the Girlie Hunt.

"For us, the Barkers bark their throats out," Ringo laughed. "All for us wild adolescent problems."

"They're heroes!" yelled Herm. There weren't many roads for the trapped, he thought; climb a tower to Mars, or drown out your brains, you couldn't long endure reality. Get to the Midway and get release. Go loose again, Jack. Muh-muh-muh.

"Hero shmero!" yelled Ringo. Again he belted out long fatty laughs and all around, kids of all ages ran this way and that having a ball, getting healthy escape from growing-up pressure that would keep them off the streets, keep them from running over innocent square-headed adults on side streets with Roaromaster Roadeaters, keep them from lounging in surly groups in front of malt shops and snarling insults at delicate ladies, keep them from roaming the vast city jungle in secret gangs and beating up honest adult moronitis victims, robbing stores of junk, and committing rape and sundry sabotage and assault.

For a moment, Herm didn't hear Ringo's laughter as they dived into the neon bath of the Midway. He didn't hear the bells, horns, drums, shrieks, and releasing energy exploding all over the Midway.

Where was he going — when the Midway ended? The Midway only a flood-lighted oasis between being a kid and being a squarehead adult who got stuck in a machine-tooled box factory or something and could never go anywhere but asleep in front of a TV frame.

Suddenly, Herm didn't want to think about anything but the Midway. The Midway couldn't end. The Midway *was* the end. The Midway was everywhere, stretching in all directions and he was in it and would never have to get out. He was suddenly taken with a flooding feel of gratitude, and he wanted to fall down on his knees and give thanks to the Midway and the schools and everybody who had ever had anything to do with building the Midways that were scattered all over the land for dangerous teen-agers to get release from ominous energy in. A sourceless sensation of suppressed terror crawled up through him and started to ooze into his throat so that he thought he might never be able to laugh or yell crazy any more.

He didn't really want to make with the gags about it. He was scared — scared if it wasn't for the Midway about what he might do, how he might sneak out at nights all full of

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dangerous steamed up energy and do something real gone bad.

Oh thanks for the Midway, Jack, it's cold outside.

The psych boys had figured it. The psych boys built the Midway. In the Midway you could get cool, it was all planned and plotted so that a kid of any age could get rid of the craziest animal impulses and it was all like fun.

Oh thanks Jack for the psych boys, they knew what was what all right.

If it weren't for the Midway, Herm thought, I'd be a juvenile delinquent ten times over by now, and sent up to the hammer with a sin record longer than the hairs of Daddy Freud's beard put end to end. I'd have innocent women's blood staining my eager beaver palms and I'd be washing them in Lux all day like Macbeth's wife who was really his mother image gone nuts with greed.

"Get yourself a Girlie, kids! Redheads, brownheads, blackheads, and luscious babes all scared and hiding from the hunters! Come on in and fire the lady's skin!"

The barker leaned down from his altar, and twisted his ratty face in a scrimey promise, and made willowy gestures of anatomical curves with practised glidings of his hands. What for a flunky middle-man like that? Herm thought. Don't they think adolescents know what they want?

"Ho, ho, Black Raider!" yelled Ringo as, with Herm, he looked over the adolescent mob gathered hungry in front of the Girlie Hunt. Dangerous energy was over the shiny upturned faces like a vapor in a Chem III lab experiment that nobody ever remembered. Who needs chemistry when you make pasteboard boxes? There were a few Black Raiders in the mob, and they yelled in eager unison.

"Ho! Hoooo! Black Raiderrrrrr!"

"Ho, ho!" laughed the barker. "Looks like lots of eager hunting waiting for release. Come on in and fire the skin. Grab a gun and get the naked lovelies on the run!"

Herm wiped at his mouth and shoved to the front and Ringo followed, both digging out their pleasure paper and throwing the credit leaves upward to grabbing fingers and getting a ring of hunting tickets in return. Across the front of the Girlie Hunt ran three-dimensional neon-activated lovelies, all shapes and sizes and colors, naked flesh shining as lifelike as life, but lovelier.

Herm was the first through the door and Ringo ran panting after, and Herm could feel sweat of animal desire popping from his skin and he didn't feel like laughing at anything any more, and Ringo wasn't even smiling. His fat round face was squeezed into determination to get release like an oldish grapefruit, and he was breathing with heavy desire.

They jammed tickets through the cage and were issued with fast practice sonic rifles, satchels of vibro cartridges, and score cards.

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Herm no longer had the urge to feel or say anything except the thrill of hunting, the all-enclosing feeling that there was only the Jungle, big as Africa, and no factory or school waiting outside of it. And Ringo was the first to hit the door leading through and into Girlie Land. Herm ran through and dropped fast to his knees as Ringo yelled a warning and flopped out of sight among thick bushes.

Trembling, Herm lay there flat and looked through the leaves, and the trees and vines and trunks of Girlie Jungle hung over him and rustled away everywhere whispering promise of danger as far as he could see.

An eager adolescent who was not in sight long enough for Herm to tell whether he wore a Black Raider button or not dropped out of a tree behind a redheaded lovely and aimed. The woman screamed and the sound was a hypo in Herm's blood and he started shaking with suppressed impulses. The teen-ager aimed and the invisible, inaudible and brief charge of sonic energy must have got the redhead dead center in the birdbrain because she ran around shrieking in a little circle, then fell squirming on the mossy jungle floor.

Herm saw Ringo, suddenly light on his feet like Jungle Man, slip away through the jungle shadows, his rifle ready for female game. Herm felt a woman's arrow rip leaves beside his head and he tried to figure quick where the shot came from. The arrows, like spiritual shafts from Cupid's bow, didn't really hurt a guy, but if a kid was honest in the hunt he had to put it on his score card. A Black Raider was strictly strychnine if he got tapped by a Girlie's Cupid arrow.

Herm crawled toward a grove of trees and he could hear the screams and shrieks of the hunted echoing along with the shouts of adolescent stalkers of Girlie game. Another arrow almost parted Herm's brush-cut hair. Hey Jack where are the giggling Girlies?

The ache in Herm's belly threatened like paralysis. He wanted to get up, get running, get moving, get shooting and shouting and watching the Girlies gallop screaming naked through the forest green. He'd never gotten a Cupid's arrow mark on a score card yet and Ringo hadn't either. Two real solid Raiders.

Herm leaped up and suddenly ran straight for the grove of trees by a lake. A brownhead with a body like Anita Starre on TV, long and cool and dipped in brown hot sauce, dropped next to the pool and ran along the edge making like a nymph. Giggling, she turned to aim her Cupid's bow.

Herm dodged and ducked and went up a tree like Jungle Man with a hotfoot, feeling dangerous suppressed desire in his blood and his breath, and he ran along a big limb, concealed by leaves and trailing vines.

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The Girlie was starting to run along the pool, still cool, and Herm aimed and fired his vibro charge. The Girlie's scream sent a flooding weakness through Herm's knees, and as she fell fainting, Herm dropped out of the tree, marked up No. 1 on his score card and ran on, shooting with a panting intensity at anything naked, giggling, or aiming a Cupid's arrow.

He marked down four more on the score card, two redheads, a blackhead, and another luscious autumnal tan. And he looked around for Ringo, but the jungle stretched away in a quiet cool way, and maybe it would go on forever for a guy who never really wanted to get out of it.

He walked a way and stumbled again on the hot sauce special sprawled beside the pool. He started to run on, wanting to find himself another redhead, but he stopped and looked down at his first shocked quarry lying there, with one hand gripping at the water like it was solid, and her face with eyes stiff-wide, looking up into the sky's phony props.

Suddenly it was like he couldn't bring his mind together with the level of his screaming feelings. He thought about it all, without thinking at all, but feeling it all and it was something distantly frightening and it rolled up into nausea.

He didn't want to leave the brownhead or the jungle where fun was. He had a creeping fear that all, everything, all of them were dying while moments hurtled out of the sun to change from gold to ashes. The jungle rippled for a while through life's muddy promising flatness, but the time wore out, the pleasure paper ran down, you had to get out into the future.

His Old Man's grimacing image covered his brain like a film.

He tried to pull himself away from looking down at the Girlie, get going fast to continue the hunt, fill out his score card, get release, be ready for the schoolmill grind, the study periods when you had to think of what you didn't really need to learn instead of thinking about jungles and adventures and Girlies, be ready for statistics, ballistics, fairy lectures and musty gestures. Why Jack, why all the study when you go into the assembly line to make with the little pasteboard boxes?

Adult squareheads and school-teaching jerks all figured a kid had to do unskilled work because it didn't take anything but a moron and was easy security, and paid higher than anything else. Sometimes a guy wanted to yell and rebel and take off out of it all.

He tried to move away from the brunette bundle, but he couldn't budge any farther through the webs of Girlie Land. He was gripping the score card so hard the stuff crinkled up like what you wanted to do to a report card, and ripped across the middle like useless scratch padding.

What was it all for? You got out of school and turned, like the Old

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Man, it a moron sticking little boxes together all day to put cereal in? To stay forever in the Girlie Jungle — but it wasn't realie real. It was just a sidefreakshow all the way to phony heaven.

He thought of the neon-jungled city exploding away in all directions so that at a thousand miles an hour in a gone Whirbug you never got out of it, but somewhere there was an edge to it, and maybe it would be like this, like Girlie Jungle and even if it was a jungle without Girlies, it would be better than this!

Herm took two steps back and felt how scared he was. He saw his Old Man's tired marshmallow face in his mind's gray space again and sweat ran down his back. He stared at the brunette. Oh Jackie girl what a way you got to get state pay, what a lousy way to stay in the gravy-getting groove. Hunted all the time and giggling phony laughs like in the TV drip shows, and even the screams were no more realie than in a TV dragnet diabol . . . knocked out of life for twenty minutes by a subsonic smack in the brain cells, and then up again to be hunted and to aim your little Cupid's arrows.

Herm sighed and was on his knees and touching the Girlie's face like touching clay. A scream smashed through the leaves, and somewhere he heard Ringo's triumphant laughter lathering the leaves like a bull ape's mating call in Jungle Comics.

Psych boys wrong, all wrong, all squareheads. Phony comic jungles and Girlie slavies getting imitatively bumped off a hundred times a day, that was not enough. That was wrong.

"It's not enough," Herm whispered. He put his fingers on the Girlie's throat. "When you know it's not a realie, it isn't enough, Brownhair."

His hands seemed far away but realie as they squeezed more tightly on the soft clay throat, and the Girlie's hand wavered on the water like a fish looking for the sun. But that's no real sky up there, Girlie, and there's no realie sunshine coming out of it, and the silver lining in the ersatz cloud-structure is reflections from a baby spot.

Herm felt his hands squeezing tighter and tighter and for realie as his mind seemed screaming to split open some prison of bone and lay bare and breathing wide a while in a real jungle far away, then to run down freedom paths to wide-openness a million miles from the City. He felt the heated conduits washing past his eyes, and he felt the throbbing threats of his own aloneness, and uselessness, and he saw himself ending where his Old Man had ended, snoring away gray life before a TV frame, never having been anywhere, and nowhere else left to go.

Even the Girlie hunts weren't enough. They ought to have something real, and there ought to be a reason for it all.

Herm leaned down and his body

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corded all down its length as he put pressure downward from his whirring brain through his arms into his hands into her throat. This would be for realie.

Was this what the adult squareheads meant? Was this the deadly danger stuff of growing pains everyone had built million-dollar midways to divert?

Release he felt all right, for realie. He felt it exploding out everywhere, and he knew now what it was. They had said so many times how dangerous he was and now Herm knew it, and he knew it for sure and all. It was like when a mortar goes off in War Comics and steely jagged knives of metal tear the flesh to pieces.

The harder Herm pressed the more slippery her neck got, the more for realie it all was for Herm. That was what they really needed, something like a war, like in War Comics. Not this phony jungle land and the props two for a nickel, and the baby spots and Cupid's arrows twanging like the harpstrings in a corny stringed longhair chamber session.

Hands strained at Herm's neck. He fought to keep his hands on the Girlie's neck, on something for realie.

"Herm! God, Herm, you're riding the wrong kick!"

"Leggo!"

"Jack! This jungle's strictly for release, don't let it hip you!"

"Leggo, leggo!"

"Don't get yourself all in a hassle, Herm boy!"

Herm felt himself being dragged away and Ringo was turning him around in the air. Ringo tried to laugh, but his face was white as he jumped toward the Girlie and felt of her pulse and her heart and her neck. When he looked up he was forcing a slaphappy grin.

"You didn't do for her, Black Raider boy. Her heart still throbs to play Cupid." He jumped to Herm's side and pulled him away toward the door that led out of Jungleland. "Man, you really got hunting fever tonight. You all right now, Jack?"

"Cool . . . Oh I got to get cool," Herm whispered. And he went stumbling after Ringo humbly out of Girlie Land and afraid of himself, more afraid of himself and his suppressed dangerous impulses than he had ever been before.

There was his Old Man's gray marshmallow face still snoring in front of the TV frame. Herm stood there on the stairs that went up to his room and looked into the living room and rubbed at his burning eyes. There weren't many roads for the trapped, Poppa, but Poppa was too dead inside to know or care.

Poppa didn't care how your eyes looked when they darted around for something real to hold to. The records didn't show when your body is hungry with all kinds of needs. . . .

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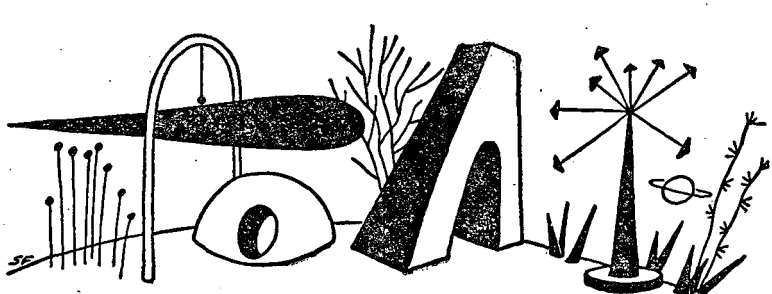
He ran on up and into the dark and into bed and lay there thinking about how dangerous he was, so dangerous that even the Midway couldn't release it safely, and there was no one to tell about how dangerous he really was.

But his Old Man and his Old Lady who never saw or understood anything, maybe they were lucky. They couldn't feel dangerous any more, if maybe they had felt that way once. They didn't feel much of anything now. They were in the gravy-getting groove, and after a while in that you didn't feel anything.

Herm closed his eyes. He thought about the dreams that were his: how great it had been to imagine himself a Black Raider flying big rockets in the night, conquering enemies, doing something big, powerful, good, and never afraid of striking out and feeling powerful because it was so gone dangerous. Real cool, man.

But it was dangerous. In two years he would be out of school, and in a little while longer he'd move up in years and slide off the adolescent chart scale and into adult squarehood. Oh Jack I'd better hurry and get off that adolescent chart before my dangerous suppressed impulses really turn into loveless juvenile delinquency.

Then I'll be safe. Like the old man. Not feeling anything, making pasteboard boxes fit together all day for the cereals that made kids feel like supermen in the mornings.



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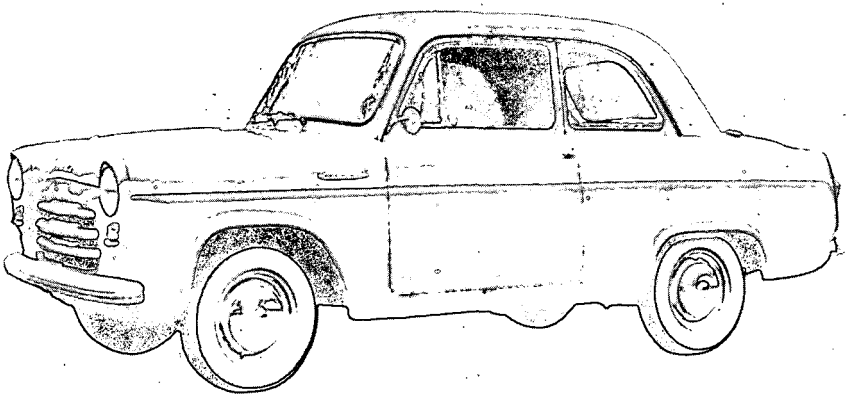

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